



COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

# A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Writing Workshop

GRADE

2



LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM  
THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

*firsthand*  
HEINEMANN  
DEDICATED TO TEACHERS™



A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR  
**The Writing Workshop**  
**Grade 2**

Common Core Reading and Writing Workshop

Lucy Calkins  
and Colleagues from  
The Reading and Writing Workshop



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# Overview of the Year for Second-Grade Writers

September	UNIT ONE: Launching with Nonfiction
October	UNIT TWO: Authors as Mentors
November	UNIT THREE: Writing and Revising Realistic Fiction
December	UNIT FOUR: Expert Projects: Informational Writing
January	UNIT FIVE: Opinion Writing: Persuasive Reviews
February	UNIT SIX: Writing Gripping Stories with Meaning and Significance
March	UNIT SEVEN: Using Nonfiction Texts as Mentors to Support Nonfiction Writing
April	UNIT EIGHT: Writing Adaptations of Familiar Fairy Tales and Folk Tales, and Perhaps Writing Original Fantasy Stories as Well
May	UNIT NINE: Informational Writing about Science
June	UNIT TEN: Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages

Second-grade teachers have some special challenges in the teaching of writing. Howard Gardner describes second grade as youngsters entering into “the age of competence,” suggesting that during the next three years, children need to develop the competence and the confidence to weather the self-critical, self-consciousness of the upcoming years. Of course, in many school systems, standardized tests rain down on children even when they are in third grade—so second grade is often the last reprieve for kids. It’s a window of time in which children can grow in leaps and bounds—if only those of us around them are willing to urge them on!

This means, of course, that as teachers of second graders, you need to be sure your teaching does not repeat but instead stands on the shoulders of the previous year, and that it takes children as far as they can go. And they can go far—especially for second graders who have been in writing workshops before this year, and are ready to draw on all they learned in order to work with increasing ambitiousness and independence. You will see that this year’s curricular calendar assumes that many of your children enter second grade with lots of experience to draw from, and that consequently, from the very start, minilessons invite children to draw on a repertoire of strategies that they’ve learned in past years. You will also notice that this year’s curricular calendar for second grade assumes that by the second half of the year, second graders are able to do vastly more than they could do at the start of the school year. Second graders come in like first graders and leave like upperclassmen!

Expect that if your students have been in writing workshops during first grade, most of them will begin second grade able to actually write—pen going down the page—for forty minutes a day, and most will work across five-page booklets, writing something like five to seven sentences on each page, completing several of these booklets each week, unless they are engaged in comparable amounts of revision. Remember that early next year, when your children enter third grade they will generally be expected to write about one notebook page of writing during one day’s writing workshop, and another full page of writing at home each night. Of course, your children will differ, and just as they will be reading books that differ in complexity level, so, too, the paper on which they write will differ. You’ll want to remember that the paper choices (like the book levels) need to change as the year unfolds. Be prepared to move children toward more challenging paper choices as soon as they are ready, giving them more lines on a page, smaller spaces between lines, and only small boxes for quick sketches. You will want to be sure that the number of sentences your students write grows steadily and dramatically—which means that during the writing workshop, children need to spend the lion’s share of time actually writing!

Any second grader who was in a writing workshop during the previous year, however, will already have experience choosing topics, getting started writing, and revising. This means that even at the very start of second grade, you can expect that your students will be able to draw on revision skills they learned during first grade, so from the start, they might use paper in a variety of ways to create different chapters and use flaps of paper to try a second way to start or end a piece or to write the most important part of the story, and they’ll be accustomed to using carets (if not page-

extensions) to insert missing information. This sort of revision should come effortlessly to your students—it will take a bit of your support to nudge students to go a step farther and write whole new chapters, and many of your conferences can support that kind of substantial revision.

Because children will enter second grade with a lot of knowledge about how to carry on as writers, it is important that they work with enormous independence and initiative. At the end of every day's minilesson, when you send them off to work on their writing, you will want to remind them of the full array of lessons they have been learning, of work they could be doing right away that day. The minilesson will have added one new strategy. Send the children off to draw from that full repertoire.

Notice how the minilessons following Unit One issue a wide-open invitation for youngsters to make decisions about the work they'll be doing on any given day—four kids might be starting a new piece of writing, another half-dozen might be using all the revision strategies they've been taught during previous years (or during a quick minilesson reminding them of those options) to revise up a storm. Try to maintain this spirit as the year unfolds.

As part of this, you'll want to be sure that your conferring is responsive to your students' different needs, which means that most of your conferring will not match the day's minilesson but will instead help writers self-assess, generate purposes, draw on strategies they think might work, and work with ambitiousness and resourcefulness. When you allow your children to take ownership of the choices they make as they write, you are following the essential principles and beliefs that inform writing workshops.

This curricular calendar, as all of our curricular calendars, has been adjusted to be in sync with the Common Core State Standards. A discussion of the Common Core State Standards that are addressed within a unit has been woven into the description of each unit and we have a document available that details the alignment.

This curriculum calendar also relies upon the *Units of Study for Primary Writing* series, published by Heinemann, and on *A Quick Guide to Teaching Second-Grade Writers with Units of Study*, a little book that is part of Heinemann's Workshop Help Desk series. These will help you make the adaptations necessary to *Units of Study for Primary Writers* so that those units are more applicable to second graders. You'll also want to secure Sarah Picard Taylor's book, *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2* (Heinemann, 2008). These books are all available through [www.unitsofstudy.com](http://www.unitsofstudy.com).

Those of you who worked with the TCRWP's curricular calendar for 2010–2011 will see that we have made some important changes, but that we have kept a lot from last year. We have added an extra unit on informational writing. You will see that this year we are recommending that you begin the year with informational writing, reminding students all they know from kindergarten and first grade. We continue to recommend that you teach two units on personal narrative writing, with the first to come early in the year and the second, to come later in the year, aimed toward lifting the level of writing. The first unit on personal narrative writing is followed by a unit on fiction writing. We hope that before the winter holiday you have time for a second

unit on nonfiction informational writing, aligned to a unit on nonfiction reading. This was added in recognition of the Common Core State Standards' increasing emphasis on informational writing and academic literacy. You will see that the writing curricular calendar sometimes matches the reading curricular calendar—for example, we imagine that students are reading fairy tales and folk tales as they also write them.

In January, we recommend that you give children support in opinion writing—writing persuasively (a perfect ramp-up to the essays they'll write in third grade) through a unit on persuasive reviews. We learned from trial and error that it is important to return to narrative writing in February, and we will return to narrative writing in the spring. The nonfiction unit that follows *Gripping Stories* in March highlights reading and writing connections. We continue to support writing in the content area in May. We also decided to keep our Poetry unit in June. In many states, including New York State, poetry is part of the third-grade high-stakes tests, so we wanted the unit to be one that your students take with them to third grade. We also felt it would revive June and send children off to the summer with extra energy.

Before releasing any suggested curriculum for second graders, it is important to recognize that second graders are an especially diverse group—there will be some who are still fledgling writers, and others who are ready for anything you put before them. Your teaching will need to be assessment-based and designed to support the diverse range of writers in your care. We encourage you to skim the documents written for first and third graders because those will help you understand ways you can support both your struggling and your strongest writers. And of course, remember that these units are provided as suggestions for you and your colleagues. We would never imagine that any of you would use these or any other resources blindly. Add to this, subtract from it, as you construct teaching that is aligned with your local and state standards, that responds to your students, and that captures your imagination, represents your values, and helps you bring your best ideas about education to your students.

## Assessing Writers at the Start of the Year

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In your eagerness to get started, don't bypass the opportunity to collect baseline data. Before you rev kids up, before you remind them of all they know about informational writing, devote one day's writing workshop to some assessment. We recommend that you simply say, "What do you know a lot about? You can make a book that teaches others a lot about that." Your second graders will then have fifty to sixty minutes to do the best informational writing they can do. This performance assessment will allow you to plan your next teaching moves accordingly, and you will also have a baseline against which to compare the work students are able to do in informational writing across the year.

You'll not only use these pieces to inform your teaching plans but you might also eventually use them to allow both your students and their parents to reflect on growth over the year, so propping them up now will serve a dual purpose. You also want to see how children do with independence. Be sure they have booklets that contain plenty of

pages (at least five) and plenty of lines on each page (perhaps eight). Be sure children also know they can add more pages if they need additional space.

Once writing time is over collect the pieces, making sure that each piece contains the child's name and the date. Study their work alongside the *RWP Information Writing Continuum* that can be found on our website at [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com). You needn't match every single trait—just look between the piece and the touchstone texts at each level and do your best to locate the child's on-demand writing within the range of sample pieces. Then look ahead on the continuum to see the work you'll teach writers over the next few months, and note specific techniques that your writers are probably already doing that you can complement (and teach). The Common Core State Standards suggest that by the end of second grade your children should be doing the work that is represented by Level 5 on the *RWP Informational Writing Continuum*, so you will want to keep this in mind as you plan for your teaching across the year. You will want to make sure that you do the same kind of assessment to see what your students need in narrative writing before you begin the units focused on narrative. Then after two months of work in narrative writing you'll redo this assessment, saying exactly the same things and providing the same conditions, and then you'll watch to see how much your children have grown in that time using the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum*. This too has been aligned to the Common Core State Standards, and you will expect your second-grade writers to write pieces that are in line with a Level 5 on our continuum. You'll bring the October and the November pieces to your parent-teacher conferences and use them to discuss children's growth. Noting each child's growth, comparing what he or she can do on the run and without assistance both now and after a bit of time, will help remind you that your teaching always looks toward tomorrow and toward independence. You will also want to notice your children's knowledge about conventions. You will not want to lure kids to revise a piece of writing so completely and so extensively that you end up scaffolding children to do work that is far beyond what they will be able to soon do on their own. You'd want to exercise caution, however, while assessing any developmental continuum. If you bypass listening and responding to a writer, using a continuum rather than the writer's intentions as the sole source of your instruction, then the tool will have made your teaching worse, not better. You will also see your children's knowledge about conventions grow in leaps and bounds this year. Children benefit most from instruction when it helps them become more powerful as they work on projects they care about, rather than studying mechanics in isolation.



## UNIT ONE

# Launching with Nonfiction

SEPTEMBER

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### Overview

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The Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Donald M. Murray is credited with developing the writing process approach to writing. Murray taught college and graduate students to write, and taught journalists at places like *The Boston Globe*, *The Miami Herald*, and the famous Poynter Institute. He did not teach five-, six-, and seven-year-olds to write. The discovery that young children could do the work that professional writers were doing was left to others. But it was Murray who turned the field of writing around, challenging the old norms of instruction and calling for a new emphasis on teaching the process of writing. Murray's work always began with him telling students that they needed to live the wide-awake life of writers, experiencing their lives and then capturing those experiences on the page.

In order to get second graders to truly live wide awake as writers, we have decided to focus this unit on informational writing, drawing not only on what they know as writers, but also on what they know about the world. In this information age there is a greater demand for informational writing, and the Common Core State Standards call for second graders to write "organized informative/explanatory texts focused around one particular topic." The Standards state that second-grade writers should be able to "recall information from experiences and other sources in order to answer a particular question through their writing." By launching kids into this genre you can start by building on what your students already know about informational writing, while at the same time getting them to realize what they might do to lift their writing within this genre.

Teachers, before you launch this unit (like any unit), you'll want to think about your goals and to plan the general trajectory of the unit. You'll probably begin with a week in which you launch your writing workshop, rallying youngsters to engage in the work that they know how to do of choosing topics and writing booklets. During this first week, your instruction will probably remind youngsters of all that they already know how to do, and help them draw on that repertoire as they do that work. That is, they'll need to think, "What do I want to write about?" and to choose the paper on which they'll write, and then they'll need to write, write, write, writing fast and furiously. When they're done writing, they'll need to reread their writing, decide if it is done or if they have more work to do on it, and if they are done, to get started on another piece of writing. For the first few days of the unit you will want to allow your kids to write any kind of piece so long as they are writing! It's not until the second part of the unit that you will get all of your kids writing informational pieces.

There are a few things that are especially essential for this year and one of these is stamina. One secret to stamina lies in the paper that you give to your children. You will almost certainly want to start the year by providing kids with booklets, not single pages. Those booklets can each contain five or six pages, and for most of your children, each page can contain just a small box for the picture and plenty of lines—perhaps eight—for the writing. Remember, they have been writing in booklets since kindergarten, so they will expect this! It is impossible to overemphasize the power that the paper, itself, has for conveying expectations. Therefore you will also want to have varied paper choices to match the different text features that they might want to include in their informational books. Within this one unit, you should expect that second graders will write approximately eight five-page books. Those are very rough estimates and certainly many children can do a great deal more than this, of course, but don't expect that second graders will write only a page a day, or a book a month!

Of course, this writing process—choose a topic, get started, write fast, reread and maybe improve the writing, get started on another piece of writing—is hardly the perfect writing process, but it is a start. During the second part of this unit, we suggest you rally your students to work in more grown-up ways with their writing partners—and those more grown-up ways of working with partners will also be more grown-up ways of engaging in the writing process. By helping students use partners to help them write really, really well, you can teach kids to engage in more extensive planning for writing, thinking about alternate ways to make the text the best that it can be, and you can teach young students to engage in more extensive revision work.

Still, even if you provide youngsters with partners and use partners to support a more ambitious writing process, this is just the very start of the year, so students will gesture toward more extensive rehearsal and revision, while for many children, their work will probably still cycle fairly quickly between rehearsal, drafting, revision, and editing. That is okay. One of your biggest goals is to launch all your writers in such a way that they can work with a lot of independence and zeal. Imagine that young writers are a bit like a group of kids who have gathered to play basketball. You are the coach. The kids are all standing around, looking at you. If you want to lift the level of kids' skills at playing basketball, you probably will not start by teaching just one small

group of kids a particularly tricky jump shot, or even teaching the whole group that jump shot. Instead, you'll first get all the kids playing the game, running up and down the court, making shots, and only after they are all playing the game with independence and confidence will you be in a position to lift the level of what they are doing. Similarly, at the start of the year, you'll probably want to first get all your youngsters cycling through whatever version of the writing process comes easily to them.

Finally, during the last part of this unit, you will return to the topic of revision, this time focusing on teaching writers to be resourceful and ambitious revisers of their writing. Of course, this time, they'll be revising toward the goal of publication as your unit reaches a culmination.

The minilessons that follow this write-up are "repertoire minilessons" that channel second graders to draw from their full repertoire of skills. These minilessons and this write-up combined will, we hope, help you encourage writers to draw on the full array of things they already know how to do. As part of this, writers will be channeled to write five-page booklets from Day One, to revise from the start of the year on, and to solve their own problems as they write.

## **Writers Draw on What We Already Know to Write Up a Storm, Then We Find Ways to Make Our Pieces Even Better!**

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From the moment your young writers enter your room, you will want them to draw on all they know as writers. This first part then, is a place to empower your students to get started independently, bringing all they have learned from kindergarten and first grade to their second-grade writing workshop. You will want to build on the fact that your writers will feel more grown-up as second graders, while still using this first week of school as a time to initiate the structures and routines that underlie any effective workshop. Some teachers have found it works to start your first minilesson by saying something like this to your writers: "You writers must be feeling very grown-up this year. Do you remember the first time you ever came to this school and you weren't sure where to go, or what to do? You were probably standing there, thinking, 'Where do I go? What do I do?' But I bet that this year when you came to school, you knew what to do! Well right now we are starting our writing workshop, and I have *huge* news to tell you. This is it: *You already know what to do.* And you don't have to sit there and ask, 'What do I do?' You can get started on writing, just like you can figure out how to get off the bus, go to the playground, line up, come into our room . . ."

If you were to start your year with a teaching point such as that one, you'd of course want, in the body of that minilesson, to tuck in comments such as, "You already know how to convene in the meeting area," and then you'd quickly summarize some of the things you assume children already know (but may have forgotten). You could also suggest children already know how to disperse from their meeting area to their work spaces (and again, this could allow you to review your expectations, perhaps acting out the transition from the meeting area to work spaces). If you do act this out, you will

probably want to physically show kids how to push in your chair, come swiftly to the meeting area, sit cross-legged on top of your writing folder in the assigned rug spot, and reread the charts that hang near the meeting area. The point is that you can say to youngsters, “You already know how to . . .” and then you can proceed to review what you are assuming children already know.

Teachers, you may worry about an opening minilesson that is so presumptuous. You may be thinking, “What if some of them *don’t* know what to do?” You may be thinking, “Yes, but this year I want them to do all those rituals in a better way than they did them before. Shouldn’t I clarify all the expectations right from the start?” If you start on Day One by teaching one strategy for generating topics for informational books, and if on Day Two, you teach a second strategy, you’ll never really know what your kids would have done, could have done, had you started the year by giving them an open invitation to go at it.

Over subsequent workshops, you will remind students not only of the routines they know, but also of the different purposes for writing and the qualities of strong writing they already know. In kindergarten and first grade your students learned to write for many different reasons. You might say, “I know that you are pros at writing Small Moment stories from your own lives, and I also know that you have written books to teach others about topics that you know a lot about. You have even written opinion pieces to persuade others to see your point of view! Wow! Not only do you know how to write for so many different reasons, but you also know how writers write in certain ways, depending on what they are trying to do in their writing. As experienced writers, you should have no trouble coming up with different topics or ideas that you might want to write about. And once you come up with your ideas you’ll be able to grab the booklet you need to get started right away.” While you will want to talk this up to your writers so that they feel empowered to do the work you’re asking them to do, you will also want to be aware of what you will need to remind them as they begin to stretch their ideas across pages.

Within your first few minilessons, you will want to teach at least one minilesson that communicates to youngsters that they should expect to make stories and books that are more grown-up! You might say to your writers, “You got started in your booklets in *really* grown-up ways. You know how to choose the right paper, to find your own topics, you even know how to start your books like grown-up writers do . . . but as I looked at your writing, sometimes the actual pieces didn’t look all that grown-up. I think you are ready to write more and to make your writing go from good to great!” Then you will need to teach them some new strategies to elaborate so that their books are a lot longer than they were during the preceding year. At this point in the unit, it is more important for students to be drawing on all that they know across all genres of writing, so that they are writing with great zeal and ambition, rather than to focus them to write only informational books right from the get-go. Some students may choose to write about small moments in their lives at this point while others will begin to write informational books about topics they want to teach others. The important thing is for you, as the teacher, to realize that the bulk of this unit is focused on informational writing so that you can be sure to demonstrate in your own writing the

choices you make in deciding what type of book to write. You may want to focus some of your lessons around the consideration of audience, and thinking about why a writer chooses to write a narrative or informational piece, allowing the writers in the room to make these decisions on their own. Be sure that you have different paper choices that align with the genre

You will want to revisit the stages of the writing process too, reminding students of all that they already know about each of those stages. For example, writers will come to you having already learned to plan their stories and books by telling or sketching them across pages, so you could say, “I’m sure you all remember how you tell your story or information across your fingers. And I see that many of you also draw pictures on each page to help you plan and remember what you want to write. Today I want to teach you that after you’ve rehearsed your piece, after you know what you’ll say, then your sketches on each page can be really *quick*—just enough to help you remember what you want to say so that you can get started on your writing right away!” This way, you remind the students of the strategies they already know for planning, while focusing on an important way to lift the level of second-grade writing, which is to devote less time to drawing and more time to writing. In general, you are going to want to be sure that your students devote five minutes or so to rehearsing for writing, not a full day!

Throughout this part, you also want to encourage your students to take ownership of their own writing, making decisions as they write to take their pieces from good to great. Your writers need to learn that they are the “bosses” of their writing. You may say to your writers, “I want to teach you that every day, you are in charge of your writing. Like a puppy, your pieces will beg for the things they need. Can you hear the barking? Everybody stop. Listen. Listen. What are your stories begging for? What information do you need to add to books? What do you need to pay attention to?”

The point in this part is that one way or another, you need to be sure that you rally kids to not only recall all that they have learned and to get started doing that work again, but also to work with zeal toward new and ambitious goals. It will also be important to notice where in the process students tend to get stuck—and to teach them how to get past that impasse. Children need to know how to come up with story ideas or topics to write about, to get started, write, finish, reread, revise, and get started on another piece, all without needing teacher involvement. They need to be problem solvers in their own writing. You might say, “When writers are stuck and don’t know what to do next, we think over our list of all the stuff we know how to do, and we *solve our own problems!*” That is, children need to be able to cycle through the writing process with independence, leaving you free enough to teach. If children are asking “Can I be done with this book and start another?” or “Can I get another sheet of paper?” refrain from answering these questions and instead coach writers to generate their own logical answers. Or at least say, “Of course. You do not need to ask me. You are the writer! You are the boss!”

## Second-Grade Writers Work with Partners in Grown-Up Ways, Helping Each Other to Share Information Effectively

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You will have begun the year teaching kids that they can draw on all they already know to write as well as possible, and inviting them to get going on their writing. After a week or so of such work, children will be ready for the unit of study to take on a new emphasis. There is no one way the unit could unfold—no set-in-stone progression to the unit—but our thinking is that if this year is going to maximize your students’ potential, you will want to rally them to work in increasingly powerful ways with each other. One of Murray’s key articles is titled “The Other Self,” and it suggests that when novice writers regularly read each other’s writing, thinking about ways that another person’s writing could be made even stronger, then writers learn to eventually become readers of their own writing, rereading their emerging draft, asking, “What’s working that I could build upon?” and “What’s not working that I could repair?” We suggest, then, that this second part of this unit might rally students to invest in partnership work to an extent deeper than they’ve experienced before. While supporting those partnerships, you can help students use partners to scaffold their engagement in the writing process. That is, while ostensibly supporting writing partners, you can actually support students’ engagement in the process of writing. “Partners help each other plan writing,” you can say. “Partners also help each other revise writing.”

After drumming up independence and confidence in the first week of second grade, allowing your students to write across genres of their choice, you will then want to shift the focus of this unit to informational writing. Therefore, while you tap into the repertoire of strategies that the students in your classroom already know, you will want to do so in ways that lift the level of informational writing in the room. You might start this part by validating the various genres that the students chose to write in during the initial part, and then you might say, “Now that you are second-grade writers, you not only know so many things about writing and what it takes to be a strong writer, but you also know so much about the world around you. You have learned so much in kindergarten and first grade, and so I thought it would be fun to spend the next couple of weeks writing informational books to teach others all that you now know.”

As we mentioned earlier, the Common Core State Standards call for a strong emphasis on informational writing, so we think it’s a good idea to get your students writing nonfiction texts right off the bat. The challenge when teaching this unit is to make sure that you are not simply giving students another month to write informational books, but that you are also ramping up the level of their informational writing. You will want to be sure that students enter this school year realizing that the expectation is not just that they dutifully fill up the pages of their booklets with facts that they know, but that instead, the expectation is that they actively, purposefully, work toward making their writing better and better. You will want to acknowledge the all-about and expert books that your students wrote in kindergarten and first grade, while at the same time letting them know that as second-grade writers they will be learning how to make these books even stronger. The writing that students were able to do at the

start of the school year—say, in their first on-demand informational assessment—is the starting line, and each week, each month, there should be visible evidence that each student’s writing has improved. It is especially important that now, at the very start of the year, each child sees his or her writing getting better, day by day, week by week, because if students start the year seeing themselves outgrowing their old selves in ways that are visible, then they’ll develop expectations for that growth curve being the status quo for second grade.

You might, for example, begin this portion of the unit by telling your students that you know they are accustomed to working with writing partners, but that you wanted to teach them that grown-up writers actually use partners in a really special way, and you thought maybe, just maybe, there would be a few second graders who might be ready to use partners like the professional writers do. Of course, your entire class will be on their knees, insisting they’re game for this, and with that drumroll you could point out the truth, which is that grown-up writers look hard to find writing partners who help us become better as writers. We know that a writing partner who isn’t just a “pat on the head, ‘Good Girl!’” partner, but who says, “You can do even more than this!” and helps us to do that, is worth a million.

It is important to recognize why writing partnerships are important, and you will want your second-grade writers to get this sense too. Partners can make pieces of writing—and writers—better. To make sure this happens, you will want to give your students strategies that allow their work in partnerships to pay off. You can teach students to take the responsibility of listening to each other’s work (and their own work) really seriously. Perhaps in partnership meetings, the writer will read aloud his or her writing, while the partner carefully listens and looks on with the reader, offering suggestions to improve readability. You might, for instance, illustrate what you don’t expect partners to do by showing what a disinterested partner might look like (leaning back in his or her chair, eyes scanning the room, yawning) and contrast that with a pantomime of an interested partner.

In this part, you will not only teach behaviors that allow for effective partnerships, but you will also want to teach strategies to help your writers lift the informational books they are writing. You will want to recognize what your children have already learned while writing all-about books in kindergarten and first grade, so that you are acknowledging how you expect so much more now that they are second graders. Instead of teaching one way that partners can help one another to elaborate on a topic, you will want to teach your writers to ask questions to one another in order to prompt places where more elaboration is needed. This is a good time to teach second graders, that not only is it important to add more to their books, but as sophisticated, grown-up writers, it is even more important to be deliberate in choosing the places to elaborate. You might say, “Today I want to teach you how you don’t just need to add more to each section of your book just to say you did, but instead you can use your writing partner to help you find the parts in your book where you need to add more.”

## Writers Revise

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Now that kids have been immersed in writing for a few weeks, you will want to remind them of all they know about revision. They may have entered second grade thinking of revision as a postscript to writing. If so, you'll want to teach them that writers shift often between drafting and revising, and you'll want to nudge students to draw on their repertoire of revision strategies without waiting to be prompted by a teacher. You won't need to teach each revision strategy in a self-contained minilesson, but instead you might introduce this part by saying, "Writers are like cooks. A cook doesn't just pour in some ingredients and then Presto! the soup is done. No way! Instead, the cook adds things, takes things away, and changes things until the writing (like the cooking) is the very best it can be."

Of course, once a text has been added to, tweaked, refined, it still requires extensive revision. You'll need to decide whether some of your writers might be game for attempting a second draft—most will probably use carets or revision strips to insert missing information. If your children have already been immersed in the workshop model, there is no reason to go back to introduce all of these forms of revision in separate minilessons.

Within this unit, you can teach your students that now that they are in second grade, and writing like second graders, they might be game to make their books like real books they might find on the shelves of the library. You might ask your writers to reread their own text as if it was a book they had checked out to learn new information about a topic. To talk up the value of learning from mentor texts you might say to your students, "If we want to write books that others will want to learn from, we can remember that other writers have already done writing that is like the work we are doing, and we can use their writing to make our writing better." Then again remind students what they likely learned in kindergarten and first grade about using authors as mentors when we write. You might take an author like Gail Gibbons, for instance, and encourage your students to notice the craft moves and elaboration techniques she uses to teach information in her books. They should already be familiar with using authors as mentors, and so you might even bring in charts from first grade when they looked at nonfiction texts as mentors to revisit how this might inform their own informational writing. In this third part, you really want to convey that as writers you expect your kids to be writing and revising all the time as they continue to learn new strategies to make their writing even better throughout the year. You want to get the students doing this as part of their everyday process, and not seeing revision as an end-of-the-unit means to publishing, but as a recursive process that allows them to consistently improve the pieces they are working on across any given unit. In this first unit you will want to clearly set the tone for ongoing revision. Therefore your students should be turning to mentors, charts, and partners throughout the entire unit to continue to make their books the best they can be as they progress through the unit.

## Preparing for Publication

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While focusing on content and trying above all to be sure your children are writing up a storm, you'll want to notice your children's spelling development, their command of the conventions of written language, and their stance toward writing conventionally. For now, you will see that some children write without a lot of concern for spelling, even the words they almost know correctly. Others obsess about spelling every word correctly, wanting your seal of approval for every decision. You need to be sure that you differentiate your instruction, helping those less concerned with spelling to take that extra second to remember to write correctly in upper or lowercase, pausing to spell word wall words correctly, and inserting end punctuation as they write. Alternatively, you'll want to help the children who see writing as little more than an exercise in spelling and penmanship to focus much more on writing quickly, fluently, with more focus on content. For all children, remember that rough-draft writing is not supposed to be perfect, and that as children grow older and more experienced as writers, more and more writing skills will become automatic and effortless for them.

At the end of the unit, children will choose their best work and they will revise more deeply and extensively, with help from you. One of the best ways for your writers to do this final revision work is to act as though they are teaching someone all about their topic. You might teach students to act as teachers when they get together with their partners to share the information in their books. In this role of "teacher" the writer will need to be prepared to respond to questions that his or her partner might have around the topic being taught. This will allow the writer to notice whether or not the information he or she has includes the most important things that someone might want to know about their topic. You will want to prompt the partners to stop the teachers to say, "But I don't understand. I don't know anything about soccer, and you mention that you need shoes to play, but will any old shoes work? What kind of shoes do soccer players wear? What makes shoes special and important to the sport?" This work aligns nicely with the Common Core State Standards for second grade where students are expected to ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics under discussion, and they are also required to ask and answer questions about what a speaker says to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic. This revision process can last for a few days, and it could, if you'd like, involve taping flaps of paper onto the bottom or the sides of a draft, using staple removers to open books up so that one page can be removed and a new one substituted, and so forth. Children will appreciate revision more if you make this as hands-on as possible. *The Craft of Revision* book from *Units of Study for Primary Writing* can give you additional ideas for minilessons during this portion of your unit.

After children revise their selected work, they will need to edit it. You will presumably already have a word wall featuring a dozen high-frequency words, and if you haven't done so already, teach your children that writers reread, checking to be sure they use word wall words correctly. Having taught this, from now on throughout the whole year you will want to remind children that they know how to do this and they

can do it without explicit instructions from you. Hereafter, after a child writes a draft of any story (even if the writer is not on the verge of publishing it) the writer needs to reread the text, checking that he or she spelled the word wall words correctly.

You will presumably also want to remind children to write with periods and capitals that signal the endings and beginnings of sentences. This concept is not simple, and although the Common Core State Standards expect that your students will have already gained command over such conventions in first grade, you will want to revisit this concept, particularly if you notice that students are not regularly attending to such things in their writing. If needed you will want to remind your writers to think of a sentence as a thought, then to write that thought down in a rush, then add the period. Moving to the next thought, you will want to begin to write it using a capital letter. The Common Core State Standards also expect that your writers will come to you already using commas to separate single words in a series, so again you might need to revisit this convention with those writers who have not yet grasped this concept, perhaps through small-group instruction. Either way you address such conventions, be sure that students understand that these are not just things to check while editing as they get ready to publish, but are important aspects of writing, and so from now on, they should do this always when they write.

Be sure you don't get overly invested in making September's published pieces perfect. Don't feel that the pieces themselves need to be more focused, more detailed, and more compelling than they are. These are little kids at the start of the year and their work will not be perfect. If you prop the work up so that it matches your high standards, then the work will not represent what your children can do, and later you and others will not be able to look at the progression of published pieces to see ways in which children are growing. This is September, and much of this unit has been consumed with empowering your kids to remember all that they come to second grade knowing how to do, so relax. You may choose to have your own private author celebration, and then hang the finished work within the safe confines of your own classroom if you need to do so in order to let the children's own work stand.

We recommend the simplest possible publishing party so that you get on to the next unit by the start of your second month of school. Perhaps just put writers into small circles where each one has a turn to read aloud, with the listeners chiming in after each author reads. Then gather the kids alongside the bulletin board where each writer leaves his or her work in the appropriate square, perhaps saying, as he or she does, "I'm proud of the way I . . ." Or, you could be the one to say what it is that you want to celebrate in each author's piece.

## Additional Resources

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As you approach this unit it will be important for you to read the entire write-up, not just the teaching points and sample minilessons below, because, in the end, kids learn through the work they do, and the write-up is jam-packed with ideas, activities, and teaching to help you organize and create opportunities for children to engage in work

that matters. The unit write-up can help you issue the broad invitation that rallies kids not only to work with heart and soul, but also to engage in deliberate practice, trying to get better at specific skills that the unit aims to highlight.

In the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. This part of our teaching relies on you assessing your students often—not in big fancy ways, but by watching the work they do—and on you seeing their work as feedback on your teaching. If you have taught something and only a handful of kids are able to sustain that work to good effect, then you'll want to decide whether that skill was essential, whether you want to reteach it in a new way, or whether you want to detour around it. You'll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching through an attentiveness to student work, because your students' work not only shows you what they can or can't do, it also shows you what teaching moves *you* can do next.

The minilessons that follow the teaching points are meant to help you reflect on this first unit of study and are by no means an all-inclusive account of the unit. These lessons are aimed mainly to get your kids thinking about all that they already know as writers. Of course, you will need to see what your students know as you assess the writing they do on Day One and throughout this unit to build upon their repertoire. You will obviously need to add many lessons (using the possible teaching points below, alongside the work that your students are producing), especially since a major aim of this unit is to ramp-up the informational writing that your students are working on.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Writers Draw on What We Already Know to Write Up a Storm, Then We Find Ways to Make Our Pieces Even Better!**

- "Today I want to teach you that as second-grade writers you already know what to do during workshop. You can remember back to first grade and kindergarten and use all you know to come up with ideas for pieces of writing you want to make, to figure out what to do if you get stuck on a hard part or word, and how to revise your work when you are done. You don't have to wait for a teacher to tell you what to do—you can use all that you know." (Sample Minilesson A)
- "Today I want to teach you that when writers are trying to write long and strong we keep our mind thinking and our pen writing."
- "Today I want to teach you that writers think about what we want to say, who we want to say it to, and what kind of piece we want to make. We think about our choices and decide, 'Is this best to tell as a story or an informational book? Or should I write someone a letter about this?' Then we gather up the paper we need and begin to write."

- “Today I want to teach you that when writers are stuck and don’t know what to do next, we think over our list of all the stuff we know how to do, and we *solve our own problems!*” (Sample Minilesson B)
- “Today I want to teach you that *writers plan*. We either sketch, tell, or even jot a couple of notes about what we will write. This helps us to get our ideas and words organized and clear before we start writing or revising.”

## **Part Two: Second-Grade Writers Work with Partners in Grown-Up Ways, Helping Each Other Share Information Effectively**

- “Today I want to teach you that as you write your informational books you can still use all that you have learned in first grade and even kindergarten. You will want to think about what you are an expert in and also who might want to learn about your topic. Really think about your audience and what it is that you want to teach them. As you write your book, keep your audience in mind, so that you are writing directly to the reader.”
- “Today I want to teach you that you don’t just fill up your booklets. You think, ‘What is the information I am trying to teach and why is this important?’ That helps your reader know why she should care about your topic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that grown-up writers actually use other writers in a really special way, and I thought maybe that some of you second graders might be ready to use your writing partners like professional writers do. We know that a writing partner who isn’t just a ‘pat on the head, “Good Girl” partner,’ but someone who says, ‘You can do even more than this!’ and helps us to do that, is worth a million.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “You don’t add more to each section of your book just to say you did. Instead, you can use your writing partner to help you find the parts in your book where you need to add more.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers need partners to listen as we read, plan, and think about our writing. As we start second grade, it’s important to remember that writing friends really listen. Listeners look for things that we like in each other’s writing and also ask questions. This helps you not only give your partner compliments but also find tips that can help your writing get even better.”
- “Today I want to teach you that partners help each other become stronger writers. We help each other not just by noticing how much our partner has become a stronger writer but what kinds of goals we can set together.”

### Part Three: Writers Revise

- “Today, I am going to teach you that writers are like cooks. Whenever good cooks think they’re done, they taste their food. Writers, we do the same thing! We don’t say, ‘We’re done!’ We read our writing to decide what we can do to make it better. We add things, we take things away, and we change things until our writing piece (like our cooking) is the very best it can be.”
- “Today, writers, I want to teach you that not only can you revise using strips and flaps to add into your booklets, but also by trying a second draft! You might rewrite your entire book or chapter inside your book. You could start from scratch, maybe with a new title or idea, and rewrite your book or chapter, putting more power behind your words.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when we are trying to write books we want others to learn from, we can turn to books that we have learned from to notice what those writers did, and we can use their writing to make our writing better.”

### Part Four: Preparing for Publication

- “Today I want to teach you that as you revise your best book you have to really think, ‘What else do I need to include in my book to help teach others and to show that I really care about my topic?’ One thing you can do is meet with your writing partner to actually teach the information. Then you will see how your partner responds. We need to be prepared to respond to questions that our partners might have around our topic.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Your partner will be listening and asking questions like ‘But I don’t understand. What do you mean?’ or ‘Why is this important?’ This will help you notice what other information to include!”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers reread our writing like detectives. We search for words that need to be fixed up and spelled better. As second graders, you already know of many tools to help you to do this. You can use the word wall, charts in the room, what you already know about vowel patterns and chunks, or you might even turn to books about your topic to help you spell words the best you can.”
- “Writers use punctuation as we write to give directions to our readers when our thought or action ends and when a new one begins. When we edit our writing we will want to look at how we used punctuation to make sure that our thoughts and ideas are clear to the reader. Today I want to teach you to read your work carefully—like a detective—thinking about what changes you need to make.”

- *Tip:* “Remember that a sentence is a thought. At the end of that thought is a period. The next thought begins with a capital letter. As we reread our work we read on the hunt for parts that we want to edit—and we use punctuation in a better and clearer way.”

## Sample Minilesson A

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*By Lucy Calkins*

### *Connection*

“Writers, you must be feeling so grown-up. Do any of you remember the first time you ever came to school and you weren’t sure where to go, or what to do? You were probably standing there, thinking, ‘Where do I go?’ ‘What do I do?’ It must feel so different this year, right? How many of you, when you got off the bus, had to just stand there and ask, ‘What do I do?’ ‘Where do I go?’ Well, right now we are starting our writing workshop and I have *huge* news to tell you. This is it. *You already know what to do. And you don’t have to sit there and ask, ‘What do I do?’* You can get started on writing, just like you can figure out how to get off the bus, go to the playground, line up, come into our rooms.”

### *Teaching Point*

“As second-grade writers you already know what to do during workshop. You can remember back to first grade and kindergarten and use all that you know to help you come up with ideas for pieces of writing you want to make, to figure out what to do if you get stuck on a hard part or word, and how to revise your work when you are done. You don’t have to wait for a teacher to tell you what to do—you can use all that you know.”

### *Teaching*

“Let me remind you of something you already know. After our minilesson it will be time for you to write, and I’ll say, ‘So Table one, you can get started. Table two, you can get started.’ If I had said that to you when you were a kindergarten student, what would you have done? Right now, pretend it’s three years ago and you are five, and it is the start of writing workshop, and I’ve said, ‘You can get started on your work.’ What would you have done? Thought?” (I act out a five-year-old, startled, paralyzed, and invite the kids to join me.)

“But you aren’t in kindergarten, are you? You are in *second grade*. So when I tell you, ‘You can get started on your writing,’ picture what you’ll do. . . . Make a movie in your mind of yourself doing that.”

“I wonder if some of you are picturing that you’ll look for the kind of paper you want to write on. I bet some of you are deciding on booklets with three pages, some on booklets with five pages. Are any of you picturing that you’ll choose your paper?”

Are you? You aren't just sitting there frozen going, 'Huh?' You are getting yourself started? Great."

"And are any of you picturing yourself thinking, 'Hmmm, what will I write about?' and deciding you'll remember true stuff you've done? Are you? Are ideas *already* coming to your mind, without a teacher telling you what ideas to have? You can think about stuff you are dying to tell people, right? And you can think about times you've had strong feelings.

"And . . . I know this is a long shot . . . but are any of you remembering that if you have a watermelon idea, like 'the day at the beach,' you can think about a small seed idea . . . like 'when a seagull ate half my hot dog.'"

"So writers, do you see that just like you already know how to get off the bus and make your way to the playground and to the classroom . . . you also already know how to write? And that means that from this day on, all this year long, you can get going on your writing, showing all that you know how to do."

### *Active Involvement*

"So right now, will you picture what is going to happen when I say, 'Table one, will you get started on your writing?' Picture what kind of paper you are going to take from the pile . . . picture yourself thinking about a story you are going to write. . . . Remember back to first grade to help you out. What are all the things that you are going to do in workshop today? Turn and tell your partner."

Have your kids turn and talk. Listen for all the things that they remembered from first grade about workshop and writing. Let them talk for a minute or so and bring them back to the whole group.

"Second-grade writers, I listened to you talk and share with your writing friends about what you learned last year in first grade. Wow! I heard you say lots of things! You must have really been paying attention because I was *amazed* at all you have learned. I could go on and on and on about it. One important thing I heard was that you learned how to pick what to write about. I heard you say you learned that you can write about things from your own life, your own experiences. Turn right now to a writing friend and talk about some of the things in your own life you could write about."

Have your kids turn and talk once more briefly. This will help them generate ideas and get a strong start when they go back their writing spots. Listen for a few examples that you could share with the rest of the class.

### *Link*

"Writers, let me stop you. I heard some of you say that today you want to write about the special people in your lives, like your family and friends. Some of you are going to write about your pets, a play date, and swimming at the pool. I even heard someone say, 'I'm going to write all about my karate class!' Yikes! you all have a lot of books to write."

"You have years of experiences swirling around in your seven- and eight-year-old minds just waiting to be written about. I know that you don't need anyone to *tell* you what to write about. I know you won't need to *ask* anyone what to write about because each of you is the one who knows these things. You were there. You are the one who saw stuff happen. You are the one who felt the feelings when those things were happening. You may have heard sounds and you may have even smelled smells—you are the one who was there. Even if someone in this room was also there, you had your own experience!"

"So guess what writers?! You are the *boss* of your own writing! Today is the first day of workshop and you have lots of ideas of books that you want to write. You learned so much last year that you are now experienced writers who know what you can write about. Don't forget those things! Use all that you know to help you as a writer. You have the ability to replay what happened like a movie in your mind. So writers, get going!"

## Sample Minilesson B

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*By Lucy Calkins*

### *Connection*

"Writers, do you realize we have only been in school for a few days? I think that if we made a list of all the stuff you do as writers, it would be taller than most of you!"

You might select a student to dramatize just how long this list will be. "Turn that way, Marco, we'll make our list alongside your back. Let's see, hmmm . . ." (I reach down to the back of Marco's shoes and start making my hands crawl up his backside, as if we were singing the itsy-bitsy spider song and the spider was climbing up the water spout. I make a large hand-size step up for each new item as my goal is to reach his head.) "We learned that . . .

- "writers can think, 'What are the cool things I've done that I'm dying to tell people about?' and we can write about that."
- "writers can think, 'What are some times when I had huge feelings—like I was really sad, or really scared . . .' because those times make for stories that make *kids* feel the same stuff I was feeling."
- "when writers finish a story, we don't just sit there . . . ho hum. Instead we . . . ? (The kids chime in—'Start a new one.')
- "writers can write a paragraph on a page, not just one sentence."

- “it helps to write not big watermelon stories, but little tiny seed stories . . . and that if we have a big watermelon story like ‘I had fun at camp’ then we can think about the little seed stories inside that.”
- “And we learned that if we get stuck on a word—we can do the best we can, right? We can stretch it out and listen to the sounds, and think, ‘How do I write that part?’ and ‘Have I seen other words that have that part in them?’”
- “And we learned that we can read over our stories and find the most important page, and we can say, ‘This needs to be my best,’ and tear that page right out and write it again.”

(By this time, I’m up to Marco’s head.) “Our list of what we have learned is as tall as Marco! Pretty soon, one of you will need to stand on Marco’s shoulders and our list will be as tall as *two* of you!”

“Right now, will you and your partner list some of the things *you* have learned in writing workshop so far this year, and see how tall *your* list is? Partner Two, stand up to be the measuring stick and help Partner One think of things to add to your list! See how tall it gets.”

(Stopping them midway.) “I need to stop you guys but *holy moly*, you guys know a lot.” (I speak over the hubbub.) “I’m going to add one more thing to your list, so I need you to sit and I need all eyes up here. This is a really, really important thing, so I need total attention.”

### Teaching Point

“Here it is. Today I want to teach you that when writers are stuck and don’t know what to do next, we think over our list of all the stuff we know how to do, and we *solve our own problems*! Sometimes, you get stuck and instead of saying, ‘I can solve my own problems’” (I make my arm into a muscle and speak in a commanding voice), “you say” (now I speak in a tiny squeaky voice and throw up my arms helplessly), “‘Help me, help me, I don’t know what to do. Help me, help me.’” (I borrow the voice of the little rabbit from the song, “In a cabin in the woods, a little old man by the window stood, saw a rabbit hopping by, knocking at his door—‘Help me, Help me’ the rabbit said, before those hunters shoot me dead.”)

“But after today, you don’t need to say, ‘Help me, help me.’ Instead you can say, ‘I can solve this myself.’ And you can pull out your list of all that you know how to do.” (I whip the list out of my pocket with triumph and hold it up, as tall as Marco.)

### Teaching

“So writers, I’ve been writing a story about how I went to the zoo and saw a boa constrictor . . . pretend I got to that word—*boa constrictor*—and I start to think . . .” (I take on the needy voice and hand gesture), “‘Help me, help me, I don’t know what to do.’ You

know what I'm going to say to myself?" (I look around to see if the kids are gesturing to show they have their list, or calling it out.) "You are right! I'm going to say, 'Lucy, you don't need to say, "Help me, help me," you can say, "I'm going to solve this myself."' (I draw my imaginary list out of my pocket, holding it as high as Marco's head.) "Then I will think about all the stuff I know how to do . . . and pretty soon I'll remember, 'Wait, when you come to a word you don't know, you can write it as best you can,' and I'll start stretching out *boa constrictor* to hear the parts of those words, right?"

"So you see, writers, you don't have to say, 'Help me! Help me! I don't know know what to do!' You can take out the list of things that you know! You can use our charts in the room to help you when you get stuck in your writing."

### *Active Involvement*

"But, oh my goodness, *what if* I finished writing my story about that trip to the zoo? What if I was *done*? And what if I knew I *could* start a new story but I wanted instead to revise my story? And what if I didn't know what I should do to revise, and I started to go to the teacher and . . ." (I'm just about to reenact the "Help me" pose but cut myself short to instead pass the baton to the children.)

"Let's pretend. Partner One, you are going to 'act stuck,' like you don't know what to do to revise your story. You are so so needy, and you just want *someone* to tell you what to do. Will you ask Partner Two for help in your most whiney squeaky little weak-kneed voice? Partner Two, your job is to remind Partner One what she or he can do. How can your partner use his or her own list of things that can help, as well as the lists in our classroom?

"Partner One, remember, you just finished your story about the trip to the zoo, and you are really stuck and needy—pretend—Go!"

Over the hubbub, I called, "Partner Two, help Partner One. Don't tell Partner One how to revise! Remind her what she can use to help get herself 'unstuck'!"

### *Link*

"So writers, you now have one more thing to add to your list of what you know how to do. You know how to solve your own problems! (And I pull out an imaginary list.) If any of you want a tiny version of our list of things you have already learned to do, I have put some of those lists on the middle of each table."

"Think about the work you are going to do today. How many of you are adding on to your story, letter, or all-about book? How many are doing what real authors do and revising? Will some of you be starting another story or letter? Okay—those of you who are starting a new story, letter, or informational book, will you get started? Will those of you who are going to be revising your books and letters you just finished, or even books that you wrote earlier this week, get started? Let's the rest of us watch to see if these writers start by rereading and thinking to themselves about their ideas for what they could do. They might even put Post-its on each page to tell themselves their ideas for making that page better. The rest of you can get started."

### *Mid-Workshop Teaching Point*

“Writers, can I have your eyes up here? I loved watching you solve your own problems today! How many of you have been acting like weak and needy ‘Help me, help me’ writers today? None of you?! That’s what I thought! And we still have twenty more minutes of writing time. How many of you think you will be able to keep yourself busy doing cool stuff for that whole time? Thumbs up if you think you’ll be able to give yourself work to do, and you won’t need to get into that ‘Help me, help me’ stuff. Right now, will you each tell your partner some of the stuff you are hoping to have time to do during the rest of today’s writing workshop, and see if you all can not only give yourself ideas for what to do but can even give each other ideas?”

“Writers, can I stop you? I know you haven’t each had time to talk yet, but I am pretty sure you can talk this out to yourself, so will you finish whatever you are saying and get started doing all this important work. And if you didn’t have a chance to tell your partner what you plan to do, tell yourself your plans before you get started doing them. Then you can get back to work.”

### *Teaching Share*

“Writers, it is really helpful to talk over the work that you do. Right now, let’s talk over the work that Jeremy did as a writer today, and think with him about the work he could do next. Then we’ll do the same talking-over with our partners. This is Jeremy’s writing. (I project an enlarged version of it, and read it aloud in a way that does not cast judgment on it, but doesn’t make it sound absolutely perfect and done either.) Jeremy, can you point out some of the things you were trying to do to make this a great story, and show us where you did them?”

Jeremy talks about how he added details and I pull from him *why* he was adding those details, and where he added them, and how he went about coming up with details. Then I ask, “What else were you trying to do?” and when he runs low on intentions, I quiz more specifically, “What were you trying to do at the start of your story?” Then I ask the other children to talk to Jeremy about what they noticed, and other ideas they had for what he might possibly try. When children are too commanding about what he has to do, I caution them that Jeremy would need, in the end, to decide for himself. Then I channel all children to work in a similar way to think about Partner One’s writing, starting with Partner One talking about what he or she wanted to do, how he or she tried to do that, making sure the writer talked about more than one intention.



## UNIT TWO

# Authors as Mentors

## OCTOBER

While the TCRWP has lots of reasons for emphasizing personal narrative writing, the good news is that this decision is firmly rooted in the Common Core State Standards, now adopted by forty-three states. The Standards require that students develop some proficiency at writing three kinds of texts: opinion writing, informational writing, and narrative texts. An examination of the student work included in the Appendix of the Common Core State Standards shows that the level of proficiency required for narrative writing is especially high. Although the standards say that second graders should recount a well-elaborated event, including details, thoughts, actions, feelings, and providing a sense of closure, this little list of expectations doesn't come close to conveying what the pieces of writing in the Appendix to the Standards convey. The message is clear: Youngsters need to develop high-level skills in narrative writing.

Therefore, in this unit children will write narratives, selecting small moments from their lives and then writing those across the pages of booklets. Since the writers in your rooms have already experienced this type of writing in past years, you will want to continue to emphasize the repertoire of work that you began in September. Children come to second grade with a backpack of tools for writing narrative, and Small Moments in particular, and this is their time to carry these tools forward, using them to craft stories that readers are eager to read. The second-grade work is to challenge writers to create the types of narratives that the Common Core State Standards require. That is, your writers will embark on a unit of study in which they will write narratives that read like real literature, stories that published authors themselves would craft. To do this work, children will study the craft of an author and incorporate these craft moves into their own writing.

One of the most important messages we give to children during a writing workshop is this: “You are writers, like writers the world over.” It makes sense, then, that we invite children to look closely at the work of one published writer and learn to let that writer function as a mentor. Once children have looked closely at a text, or at several texts, written by one author, noticing the author’s craftsmanship, they can turn toward their own writing, reflecting on their own craftsmanship, thinking, “Perhaps I could try this in my piece.” So, one goal for this unit will be for children to embark on a life of noticing craftsmanship and then applying that craft to their own work, lifting the quality of their writing by doing so. Imagine that your children will be writing half a dozen booklets, each with five pages and approximately one paragraph per page, during this unit. From the start they will write Small Moments under the influence of their author of study and then, as the unit progresses, they will revise pieces, as authors do, using all the craft moves they have learned from start to finish.

A word of caution: This unit is, at its core, about strengthening narrative craft. It is not a unit for writers to craft adaptations of an author’s book. If you are studying Kevin Henkes as a mentor author, your writers will *not* walk away with eight to ten versions of “Malik Worried” stories where they themselves worry and worry themselves into a tither, only to find a best friend with similar issues and find a place in the world. Your writers will walk away from the unit with the ability to write dialogue and small actions that reveal a character’s inner beauty by carefully choosing and crafting words and phrases that belong to that character. So, as your writers dive into the rich work of Small Moment writing, you will want to be sure to rally them around studying how each of the mentor pieces was written. This work will be especially critical at the start as children generate story ideas and begin writing their booklets. The unit draws upon *Authors as Mentors* from *Units of Study for Primary Writing* (Heinemann 2003), which will be a helpful resource for you as you teach this unit.

Before you can decide upon the mentor author your class will study, you need to mull over the kind of texts you imagine your children writing during this unit. Because this unit comes early in the year and sets the stage for the upcoming unit on fiction, we strongly suggest you choose a mentor author who can help children with the *craft* of writing effective, focused narratives.

Three of our favorite authors for this are Donald Crews, Angela Johnson, and Ezra Jack Keats. Chances are good that your children studied these authors during previous years, but if not, you may want to select one of them. Specifically, *The Leaving Morning* and *A Sweet Smell of Roses* (Angela Johnson), *The Snowy Day* and *Pet Show!* (Ezra Jack Keats), and *Short Cut* (Donald Crews) are all splendid touchstone texts for this unit. However, you probably will not want to select a text and an author that children studied in earlier years. Other options include *Owl Moon* (Jane Yolen), *My Father’s Hands* (Joanne Ryder), *I Love My Hair* and *Bippity Bop Barbershop* (Natasha Anastasia Tarpley), and many of Kevin Henkes’ books (including, for example, *Sheila Rae, the Brave*, *Wemberly Worried*, and *Sheila Rae’s Peppermint Stick*).

Once you have selected a mentor author and a mentor text or two, don’t announce this to the children yet. First, read the book aloud doing everything you can to make the read-aloud magical. If your children are as taken by the book as you are, they may

feel as if they are part of the process of deciding to take on a special relationship with this author, this text.

As you study this mentor author, you might focus on how the author writes for the reader. This work can be geared in ways that could challenge any writer or it can be angled to rally children to invest more energy in the basic conventions that second graders are expected to control. If you decide to gear this in ways that are especially challenging, you will probably want to emphasize all the ways that writers write for the ear. Teach children that writers can use punctuation (and the complex sentence structures that generally accompany varied punctuation) to convey meaning by guiding readers to vary their intonation, reading some passages as if they are secret tips tucked into the main message and reading others as if they were confrontational challenges. For example, show students that authors use ellipses to create suspense, or to let their readers know that something *big* is about to happen. Writers can also use temporal phrases for transitions such as: *After that*, *Early one morning*, and *Suddenly*.

While we imagine that most second graders have been in writing workshop since kindergarten and are therefore well versed in narrative and prepared for this work, some of you may find that your children are more novice narrative writers. If that's the case, you might want to refer to the first-grade curricular calendar, studying the unit on Small Moment writing. You may also want to refer to *Launching the Writing Workshop* from *Units of Study for Primary Writing* (Heinemann, 2003). You will likely want to begin this unit with an on-demand writing assessment, asking children to write a focused narrative to show what they know about writing, and then use the RWP's *Narrative Writing Continuum* to assess their work and determine which trajectory best suits this year's class.

## Rehearsing and Drafting Lots of Stories under the Influence of an Author

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You will want to begin this unit by inviting children to live like the writer they adopt as a mentor, while maintaining and building on the volume and stamina you established in September. Even if you do not know much about the life of the particular mentor author you have chosen, you can convey to children that this author almost certainly lived differently because he or she was a writer. This person probably paid close attention to the details of life, recognizing those details as potential grist for the writing mill! In order to tell children about the attentive, wide-awake life of a writer, draw on words *any* writer has written to describe that writerly life. For example, you could read aloud a page or two from *I'm in Charge of Celebrations* by Byrd Baylor, using that excerpt to show that writers (including the mentor author you have decided to study) don't just walk past all the details of our lives. When a writer drives along a road, the writer is apt to glance up at the beautiful clouds, and to see that one is shaped like a parrot. Others might just drive on, but writers say, "My gosh! Look at that!" and pull over. Pretty soon more cars stop and there is a whole tribe of parrot cloud worshippers looking up at that cloud. Baylor's

*The Other Way to Listen*, Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird*, and many of Georgia Heard's books can also help you bring children into the writerly life.

In *Authors as Mentors*, we suggest that in order to live writerly lives, youngsters carry tiny notepads with them, jotting or sketching the little things that happen. Children have loved this concrete tool that can help them assume the role of writer, recording details of their lives. If you decide to encourage writers to keep Small Moment writing pads, we recommend you purchase the smallest notebooks you can find and then scissor them into thirds so that these notepads are truly tiny. Otherwise, children start writing their whole stories into these, and of course those stories end up horribly underdeveloped. You might say to your children, "I bet Kevin Henkes got the idea for his story, *Sheila Rae, the Brave*, from one day when he got lost. He must have thought to himself, 'I need to remember this moment,' and then jotted or sketched it in a notepad."

You will want to carry your own Tiny Topics notepad, and make a rather public show of how you take it out to record the small moments that happened to you. "Oh my goodness!" you might say, "I slipped on the ice and Audra kept me from falling. Soon Audra and I were skating on that ice! That would make a great story! Let me jot just the words 'slipping on ice—Audra helped' in my Tiny Topics notepad to hold onto that idea."

Of course, collecting ideas in a notepad will happen mostly outside of school, although writers could also take five minutes of the writing workshop to collect ideas for stories. But within ten minutes of the writing workshop's start, you'll probably need to lead a mid-workshop teaching point to remind writers that once writers have collected a few story ideas, writers read our notes in order to select small stories that we think would make others laugh, or wince, or catch their breath, or lean in close to hear more. Then, we take this story idea and plan the story. This, of course, takes just another five minutes or so—don't imagine children spending a whole day planning a story! Remind children of the planning strategies they already know. Some writers will choose to stretch their small story out over five fingers, retelling the story in a finger-by-finger fashion, touching each finger and telling that increment of the story. Other writers will do similar storytelling work, touching the pages of a booklet instead of their fingers. You might say, "Writers, as you well know, writers don't just dive right into writing. We take a minute to plan how our story will go. You already know lots of ways to plan. You know you can sketch across the pages of your booklets, stretch the moment out over five fingers, and practice storytelling as you touch the pages and tell the story. The important work is for us to use what we already know. Writers think, 'Which strategy will I use today?' Then we quickly begin to rehearse our piece." After planning, children will write the story in full: "I was walking to the park in my new brown boots, when all of a sudden I slipped on a patch of ice. My feet did a little dance as I tried to steady myself. Just as I was about to topple over, I felt a hand on my arm. It was Audra to the rescue! We laughed and linked arms. Then something happened. My feet started sliding again and so did Audra's and before we knew it, we were skating on that patch of ice. It was fun!" All of this will happen within the first day of the unit, keeping the pace of starting, and sometimes finishing stories, in one or two days. Just

as in September, writers will be revising on the go, so when we finish one book, we pause to reread and think carefully, “Is this how I want this part to go?” or “Hmmm, could I add something more here?”

In this first part, in addition to thinking about where authors get ideas, you might notice with your writers how your mentor author structures his or her writing, perhaps noticing in *Sheila Rae, the Brave*, that Kevin Henkes really spends a lot of time on the part when Sheila Rae is lost because that is the most important part of the story. You might also notice how the bulk of the story is about one time, and one big thing that happened, and that the author doesn’t just rush right through it, but tells what happened bit by bit. Kevin Henkes doesn’t just say, “Sheila Rae got lost, but then her sister found her.” He takes his time to really make a movie for the reader. It’s not one page, problem, next page, solution, but many pages on each. This can also be a way to talk about building volume. “Kevin Henkes doesn’t stop at five pages, so why should we?” You might also point out in this first part, all the things the author did that we already know how to do, helping writers maintain their repertoire of skills. In this first week, you will probably expect writers to write two or three books, each one a little stronger than the one before.

Then too, right from the start, you will want to encourage writers to use all that they learned in prior years to develop the characters in their stories. You might say, “Writers, when you were young, you all drew stick figures in your sketches. And, all of them looked alike. But then, as you grew older, you added more details and began to sketch characters that were distinct, they didn’t look alike and they each had their own defining characteristics. Well, as writers grow older and stronger, the characters in our stories go from being stick figures to fleshed-out people. We add details that describe how each character looks so that our reader can see each one clearly in her mind.” Or, you might teach your writers that to create robust characters they write not only what that character does, but also how the character does those things. And, you will want to emphasize that writers not only do this rich character development for the main character, or ourselves, but for all the characters in our story. Of course, as you teach each of these lessons, refer back to the mentor author, showing the children how each of these comes to life across the pages of the books they are studying. This will remind your writers that with making reading-writing connections, we don’t choose similar *topics* as the mentor author—but we do use similar *techniques*.

When you are helping children study and incorporate what authors have done into their own writing, you will probably want to go back to the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* and think again about where your children are in the process. For example, if many of them are at Level 3, writing brief chronicles about how they (or a character) progressed through a sequence of events, then you may want to point out what the mentor author has done by finding instances of that author doing some of the work that is especially important in Level 4 narratives. After all, those are just beyond what the children are doing now. For example, the *Continuum* states that a writer of a Level 4 narrative “may begin to demonstrate some sense that a narrative account requires an ending. The ending may involve an emotional response.” Ryder ends *My Father’s Hands* with an emotional response: “No one will ever bring me better treasures than

the ones cupped in my father's hands." It is helpful to realize that most qualities of good writing can be thought of as trajectories, as lines of development, along which a writer can develop.

## Writing Stronger and Longer Drafts under the Influence of an Author: Writers Study Authors We Admire and Try Their Craft in Our Own Writing

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After children have written a few stories in their five-page booklets, you will want to remind them that writers are often influenced by craft. That is, we turn to a mentor author, studying her work to see *how* the author makes her story as strong as possible and letting the author influence our own work. What others have done gives us ideas for ways we can make our stories even better as we write.

When teaching children to make reading-writing connections, it is important that they have already read and appreciated the text under study. After reading a text simply to appreciate it, readers can reread that text, looking for places in it that "got to us." Portions of a story that make a reader say, "Ugghhh," or "Ahh" are portions that we want to study, asking "What did the writer do to get this response?" Show children that after you've appreciated a text, you return to it, thinking especially about the places that made you feel something intense, the places that made you gasp, the places in the text that you want to savor much like you would savor an ice cream cone on a warm day. You might say, "Writers, when we read beautiful, tasty stories by other authors, we sometimes need to remind ourselves to slow our reading down and really notice the beauty of the literature. We need to savor the parts of the story that most speak to us, our favorite parts."

If your mentor text is *Sheila Rae, the Brave*, for example, you can share how you felt humbled and awed by the author's precise word choice: "The sounds became more frightening. The thoughts became more horrible. Sheila Rae sat down on a rock and cried. 'Help,' she sniffed." You might say, "Listen and envision this moment. Can't you just see Sheila Rae on the rock, and hear her voice as she sniffs 'Help' in a tiny voice? Can't you just feel how frightened she is? Kevin Henkes didn't just write, 'She was scared. She said, 'Help.''" No, he imagined it and tried to choose words that showed *exactly* what Sheila Rae did and said so we could feel what she felt."

You will want children not only to notice these poignant moments in text, but also take the craft moves they are seeing and try them in their own writing. You want children to say, "That was so delicious! I'm so inspired! I want to write just like that!" and then race back to their pieces and write feverishly. To do this, you will want to teach children that writers analyze the text. You might ask students, "What, exactly, did Kevin Henkes do that worked so well? What did he do to make this part stand out?" In the example we just saw, Kevin Henkes chose a dialogue tag, "sniffed," that captured a feeling; students too could try dialogue tags that communicate a feeling. And you could ask children, "What did this author do to make me feel so sad? What did this author do to make me laugh?" and so on.

While studying an author's text, you and your children might also notice, for instance, that your mentor author uses punctuation to grow suspense (ellipses, dash marks, or commas), making the sentences sound more and more exciting, or for emphasis, as Molly Bang does in *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really, Really Angry*. . . . Point out to kids that even the title includes a dash and ellipses. Or they use short sentences, as Kevin Henkes does in *Sheila Rae, the Brave* to convey fast actions. He writes, "Sheila Rae walked and walked. She turned corners. She crossed streets. It suddenly occurred to Sheila Rae that nothing looked familiar."

Second graders often write sentences that have many "and then . . . and then . . . and then . . ." sentences that go on endlessly. In their eagerness to get lots of information onto the page, they miss the chance to write varied sentences. Help them find new ways of elaborating by examining ways in which mentor authors elaborate without resorting to "and then" over and over. If your mentor author is Molly Bang, you could point out that in *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry* . . . Molly *could* have written, "She kicks and then she screams and then she wants to smash the world to smithereens and then she roars a red, red roar and then Sophie is a volcano, ready to explode." Instead, Molly draws out the action, showing us how Sophie's anger builds and builds by separating these actions into short, fast bits: "She kicks. She screams. She wants to smash the world to smithereens. She roars a red, red roar. Sophie is a volcano, ready to explode." And then, Sophie takes action: she runs! "She runs and runs and runs until she can't run anymore."

You can teach your children that writers write with readers in mind, making sure their texts include things like end punctuation. When you teach this, remind writers that usually a person thinks of a whole sentence, a whole thought, and then we write without stopping until we get to the end of that thought and put a period down. Then we have another whole thought, and starting with a capital letter we write and write until that thought is down, again without stopping, and we put a period there. The kids won't do this perfectly and that is okay. Your goal, though, is for kids to begin to write in sentences of thought, punctuating on the run. Punctuation should not be an afterthought that writers insert once a text is completed, although of course once a text is completed writers can reread, using punctuation as road signs, finding places where the punctuation may need to be altered.

As children work on writing with voice and using punctuation and sentence structure to bring out their stories, you can suggest they look at mentor texts again, noting the sparkling and unusual words mentor authors use, the ways they use short sentences, and even sentence fragments, to increase the pace and excitement. Or how they alternate long and short sentences, or have repeated sequences of long or short. You might teach children to look at how the punctuation affects the tone, and the unusual punctuation, such as ellipses and dashes. Then, too, you might teach your children that they can look at how the mentor opens up his subjects—the things he chooses to illuminate in his stories.

Remember, as children move through this part, they should be attempting each of these things as they compose as well as when they practice ongoing revision. As you move through these next few weeks, you will want to ensure that children are writing

stories that incorporate all you have taught as they write, not just as an afterthought when they are done.

Once children have noticed that an author uses a technique (such as weaving narrative with rich, precise language to bring something to life), you will probably want to return to a text that you worked on publicly earlier in the year—your own story or a whole-class story—and invite children to think about places where you could have used this technique for good purpose. Then you and the class might rewrite those sections to incorporate that technique. You might invite children to reread their own writing in a similar way, and, more importantly, to think of another technique the mentor author used; then they can search for places where they could use that same technique to good effect in their writing.

Craft techniques will be collected onto a chart that the students can use to remind them of all you have taught. These could include the techniques just mentioned—building suspension, using sensory images, using comparisons—as well as others, such as using repetition, sound words, and small actions to slow down the story. The chart might contain an example or two of a “craft move,” then the name that the class has given to that craft move, followed by an effort to talk about the effect this device has had on the children as readers. For example, the chart might contain a couple of Henkes’ precise dialogue tags, then it might name what Henkes has done, saying, “Uses exact action words instead of ‘said.’” Finally the chart might say, “Helps the reader picture exactly how the character talked.” At first, children will summarize a craft move with just a word or a phrase: “He wrote his feelings.” You will want to help children talk with much more specificity about what, exactly, made this particular technique so effective. You might point out the decisions the author made, the path he could have—but didn’t—take. “He *could* have just said, ‘I felt sad,’ but he didn’t. Instead he wrote . . . What, exactly, do you think he did here that makes this part convey feelings in such a powerful way?” And then discuss what makes this particular detail, description, or bit of dialogue so effective.

## Deeper, More Powerful and Thoughtful Revision

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After children have spent several weeks composing new pieces, each one getting a little stronger than the one before, quickly revising each on the run, you might choose to stop writing new pieces and take a week to linger over all the powerful revision writers can do. You might spend this week having children take out all the pieces they have written so far and “have a go” at the deeper work of revision. Taking time to focus on revision will help it to become an effortless part of writing for these kids, and not just what a writer does in preparation for publication. During this unit, writers can never get enough of their revising pens, strips and swatches of paper, scissors and tape, and staplers and staple removers for adding several pages to their booklets. These tools should remain in your writing center from the previous unit of study, so be sure to replenish your supplies. Create a drumroll around this with your writers: “Writers, I am refilling our writing

center with lots and lots of revision tools because I know you will be revising so much as you learn how to write from other writing teachers!”

As children try out one and then another technique, be sure to nudge them to be independent. That is, don’t set up an atmosphere in which all children try out the same technique at one time; the idea is not for children to be working in sync. Rather, you’ll want kids to generate their own ideas and to use those ideas in their own writing. The goal is for children to try techniques that resonate for them—ones they admire—and for them to use the influence of an author mentor’s craft moves to influence their own craft moves. What works for one child’s writing won’t necessarily work for another’s. You will want to support them with this work, teaching them how to examine their pieces and their mentor’s pieces and think, “What is it I really want to do to make mine stronger?” Then, encourage them to race to the writing center and grab the tools to carry out this plan.

Earlier we described craft charts that the class might keep during this unit (and beyond it). The goal of independence should be ingrained enough that you think, “I bet I should nudge each child—or at least those who seem ready for this—to keep his or her own craft chart as he or she reads during independent reading so the child records what he or she notices authors doing.” In any case, all children need to draw on all the craft techniques they have noticed as they write and rewrite stories. The message, then, is “Go to it!” resulting in a flurry of “I notice . . .” and “I’m going to try . . .” based on the students’ observations of the writing of the mentor author—and eventually of any author.

Partners will also be an important part of fostering independence and large-scale revision. When two partners come together to talk about their writing, rather than the partnership conference starting with one writer simply reading aloud his or her draft, there needs to first be discussion so the listening partner has some sense of what he or she is listening for. Partners, then, might begin a conference by asking (as teachers, too, are apt to ask), “What are you working on today as a writer? How’s it going? How else could you have written that? What are you planning to do next?” Once the listening partner has an idea of what the reading partner is working on, the reading partner can read aloud her draft—or a section of her draft—and as she does so, she can put Post-its on the parts that affect the listening partner (pages that make that person laugh or say, “Oh my goodness,” or lean in close, and so on).

## Wrapping Up the Unit

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As the month draws to a close, you will again ask children to select a narrative they especially like to further revise and to publish. You may want to celebrate your students’ growth as writers by having them publish their books as picture books, just like their mentor authors. They can study how these authors create titles for their books, who they write dedications to, and what information they choose to include in the “About the Author” section. Authors also have publication parties where they share snippets of

their books with an audience. These books can be placed in your classroom library or on a special shelf in your library, and be available for independent reading.

Another enjoyable and meaningful way to celebrate students' growth in this unit is by putting on a Readers' Theater in which kids perform the parts of a script out loud. You can draw on one of your mentor texts to create a script either on your own or as a class. If your mentor author is Kevin Henkes, students could put on the play of *Sheila Rae, the Brave*, with half the class taking the part of Sheila Rae and the other half Louise. Perhaps you or a student would be the narrator. Explain to kids that Readers' Theater is different from a regular play in that the performers don't wear costumes or move around a lot. There's also no scenery or props. Instead, performers use their voices, facial expressions, and slight gestures as they read their parts. This is the perfect opportunity for kids to draw on their knowledge about how good literature appeals to the reader's ear to bring familiar texts to life "on stage."



## UNIT THREE

# Writing and Revising Realistic Fiction

## NOVEMBER

**Y**our second graders will be dying to write fiction, and this is a perfect time to introduce this unit because the most important message you'll want to convey is this: Use everything you learned during the previous unit of study in order to write fiction. That is, you will want to make it clear to your children that while they are embarking on a new unit, this unit is another narrative unit. Therefore, they will want to draw on all the craft moves they learned from Authors as Mentors and all the strategies they have in their repertoire from writing Small Moments. The goal for this unit will be to write well-elaborated short stories. The Common Core State Standards call for second graders to write sequenced narratives, while providing a sense of closure, so you will want to help your writers think about the arc and language of their stories, about the passage of time, and about the need for a conclusion that brings the story together.

As you head into the unit, be clear that children will write lots of stories during this month, and they will progress through those stories, working at their own unique paces. Your launching day will make all the difference in the world. On this day, you will want to demonstrate that writers select a planning strategy from a repertoire of possible ways to plan. Then plan by thinking of a character who has a problem and an eventual solution, and after thinking of such a story idea, writers write the start of a story on paper and then think of another possible story and write the start of that story as well. If you teach students to plan out and start several stories, right on Day One of the unit, it will be far more likely that as the unit unfolds, writers who complete a story quickly will have others in-waiting and will be able to shift to write those other stories, not waiting until the whole class progresses in sync from one story to the next. This will allow the fiction writing workshop to feel like a workshop, with writers working zealously on their pieces, with some starting a new story on any given day while others

continue working on a story. The unit ends with an invitation for writers to look back on all the work they have generated—which for some students will be an armload of stories—selecting one or two of those stories to revise deeply and extensively.

In addition to emphasizing repertoire and independence, you will also want to use this unit as an occasion for building volume. You can support children to write longer stories in part by shrinking the size of the planning-pictures children make, or by encouraging some children to jot a quick phrase in each of those planning boxes rather than relying on drawing, which is a more time-consuming vehicle for planning. Then too, think about the paper choice that children will have during this unit. If children have tended to write in five-page booklets with five or six lines on a page, some of their pages will now contain more lines. Of course, every table needs extra pages so that students can expand their booklets, and also every table requires flaps and tape so that writers are encouraged to revise without waiting for encouragement to do so. Don't underestimate the expectations that can be conveyed just through your materials!

## **Writers Draw on Everything They Know to Write Fiction Stories**

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Early in the unit, you might ask children to recall what they already know about writing fiction stories. Most of your youngsters will have written fiction stories last year, and the experience will probably have been memorable. You could even ask children to bring in stories they wrote last year, or at the very least, they could tell partners about those stories. By starting the unit with this invitation for students to recall previous experiences writing fiction, you are making sure that you do not act as if this will be the very first time your children have ever written fiction. You may even go so far as to start the unit by asking students to write an on-demand realistic fiction story. That way, you will be able to assess what students remembered from realistic fiction writing in first grade and adapt your unit plans accordingly.

Before you ask, “What did you learn last year?” you will need to predict what you'll hear and decide whether your message will be “This year, let's do the same,” or whether your message will be “This year, because you are older now, let's now try . . .”

For example, you may hear that last year, children were channeled to write stories about a child who was their age. They may have learned that authors often base their stories on themselves or on people they know. The TCRWP staff tends to suggest you continue to channel kids to write about characters who are roughly their age, so that youngsters have a wealth of experiences and emotions they can channel into that character. Children may report that in previous years, they often spent a day or two coming up with ideas for their character, drawing the character and writing notes about the character. It is true that this is one way to get started on fiction stories—and some writers may continue to use that as their starting strategy. But in general, we have found that it works best for writers to first come up with a general storyline and only then develop a character or two within that story. So we're recom-

mending that a child might first decide, for example, to write about a character who is new to the school and has no friends, and then afterwards flesh out the character, deciding if this youngster is a girl or a boy, giving the character a name, and so on. You might suggest writers begin by collecting story ideas in their Tiny Topic notepads, before getting started on their booklets. The child might write, for example, “a kid moves and has no friends and then gets a friend somehow,” or “a kid wants to make a goal in soccer, and then does.” You should suggest that children carry their Tiny Topic notepads home with them, as they did in the previous unit, thinking of and jotting down story ideas while they are away from the writing workshop. As a child waits for the school bus, he might jot down, “misses bus and walks to school.” As the child heads off to art class, he might write, “boy makes great painting in art and wins prize.”

After a day of generating ideas for stories, your children will have plenty of possibilities for a story. They will choose one of those and perhaps spend a few minutes fleshing out the character in that story. Alternately, the writer can begin to write the story, just to see how the story might work, trying her hand at starting a first page. It may be that a writer generates five or six story ideas, selects three as good possibilities, and then writes a couple of different first pages to each of these stories. So, encourage writers to dive in, using several story ideas. If you can help writers to generate a bunch of different possibilities, you help them realize that writing is a process of trying something out, then reviewing it critically and thinking, “Wait, I have a better idea!”

Once a writer has chosen one of these story ideas, he will want to spend a bit of time—five minutes, perhaps—rehearsing for that story. It helps for the writer to tell the story she might write across her fingers or to say the story aloud as she turns the pages of a blank booklet. By telling a story multiple times and in multiple ways before writing, the writer makes it likely that the first draft will be much more effective.

Writers can do this storytelling by touching the pages of a blank booklet on which they will soon write their story, or they can use a strategy that older students use, which is to fold a sheet of notebook paper into quadrants to make a mini-booklet, quickly sketching four panels to capture what happens first, next, next, and last. Using the four “pages,” you can suggest that each child quickly sketch how his or her story might go. The story about the boy winning a soccer goal, for instance, could start: page one, a stick-figure boy kicking the ball into the goal—no words are necessary. The writer would then need to figure out what occupies the next pages. Is the boy treated like a hero by his teammates—and if so, how exactly? Then, what happens on page three? Does he teach a little kid how to play soccer and watch while that kid makes a goal? The point of this mini-booklet is to take all of three minutes to sketch a story from start to finish, so a child can sketch a couple of versions for how the story might go, storytelling each (touching the page and saying aloud the exact words the writer might write). We prefer these mini-booklets to storyboards, but the two are really versions of each other and you can use either scaffold, or neither. The important thing is that in any case, you will not want to give writers ditto sheets on

which to plan their writing. These should be informal—not photocopied! It is also important for writers to be encouraged to try their stories one way and then another way, deciding how they should go. In essence, they are revising before they are even writing a single word. Once the writer has a plan for the story, he or she can shift to sketching pictures across the pages of a full-sized booklet, or, if writers want to do so, into immediately writing his or her story.

Remember to encourage revision from the start of the unit as aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Writing is a powerful tool for thinking precisely, because when we write, we can take fleeting and intangible memories, insights, and images and make them concrete. When we talk, our thoughts float away. When we write, we put our thoughts onto paper. We can stick them in our pocket. We can come back to them later. We can reread our first thoughts and see gaps in them. We can look again and see connections between two different sets of ideas. Through rereading and revision, writing becomes a tool for thinking. A commitment to revision is part and parcel of a commitment to teach writing as a process.

You can encourage revision by revisiting all that the students have learned about narrative writing. You may want to pull out the chart from the previous unit where you noted craft moves from mentor authors to remind the students of all you have taught. Put this chart front and center, since many of the moves you noted will be just as useful for realistic fiction stories as for personal narratives. You will also want to revisit the power of partnerships in ongoing revision. Reminding your writers how since Unit One they have been reading their pieces to their partners, acting out what’s happening and asking one another questions to make their pieces go from good to great. You will want your students to be able to both give and take feedback from peers in order to strengthen their writing in alignment with the revision work named in the Common Core State Standards.

Of course, once students have written a story they’ll proceed to write another—not waiting for you to march them along to this in sync! As children cycle through the process, writing more and more stories, you can continue to teach in ways that lift the level of stories that have yet to be written, and in ways that prompt writers to reread and reconsider stories they once thought were done. It could be, for example, that your children write their first stories without you having had much of a chance yet to teach them that once a writer has a story line, it helps to take some time to develop the main character. That’s okay. You could teach this to children when most of them are in the midst of their second story. But at some point, you will want to let children know that writers often take time to flesh out characters before writing the actual story. Please try to steer clear of channeling students to work within ditto sheet graphic organizers with spaces for listing a character’s internal and external characteristics—that work has not panned out for K–2 writers—it is best saved for upper elementary grades. We do, however, believe a writer can think and talk about what the character is like and act out that character showing how she goes about doing things. Is she shy? Timid? Frantic? Once a child has a character well in mind, the child’s writing can be much more colorful.

## Lifting the Quality of Effective Fiction Writing

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By the time many of your children are working on their third and fourth stories (likely somewhere in week two), you will probably want to teach writers ways to dramatically improve their writing. To get children to tell, not summarize, their story, the writer will decide, “This is a story about a girl who wants a dog because all her friends have them. At first her parents say, ‘No,’ and then she gets it.” Once the writer comes up with the story, he or she begins writing: “Emily wanted a dog. ‘Can I have one?’ she asked. Her mother said, ‘No,’ because they didn’t have the money. Then one day she was walking to school and she saw something and it was a dog.” End of story. It is crucial to teach children that they need to think, “What, exactly, will be happening at the start of my story? If the girl wants a dog, what exactly is she doing to show this? If this were a play, what would she be doing on stage?” Perhaps the child decides that the main character is going to talk to her mother about getting a dog. The child might write, “Emily walked into the kitchen. Her mom was making dinner. ‘Mom! Mom! Can I have a dog? Annie has one and it’s really cute,’ Emily whined.” As she storytells, you’ll teach her to make a movie in her mind of the exact story, and begin reimagining it, reliving it.

All the advice you might give children to include characters’ feelings or to make characters talk is almost inconsequential compared to the absolutely crucial importance of teaching kids to relive the story as they write, imagining the story unfold bit by bit. One of the best ways to help children imagine a story, by making a mental movie, is to encourage the writer to act out the story, then record what he or she does. You may, then, want to move partnership time to the start of the writing workshop and to suggest children act out the small moment that makes up their fiction stories before giving words to those actions and that dialogue.

You might also get your writers to think about the stories they are reading and how other authors bring characters to life. Remind them that not only do writers look to other authors to learn how to become better writers, but they also look to their favorite books and the characters in them to see how good writers don’t just say, “The boy felt sad.” Instead they flesh out their characters in ways that make the characters come to life. In order to talk up the value of learning from mentor texts, you might say to your students, “If we want to write stories that will draw people in and make people want to read them, we can remember that other writers have already done writing that is like the work we are doing, and we can use their writing to make our writing better.” You might highlight how an author like Mo Willems fleshes out his characters in some of your read-alouds in order to teach them how they can do the same thing, and then share a second-grade example. “I’m telling you this because today I want to teach you a secret that writers use when *we* want to flesh out the people in *our* stories. Just like Mo Willems did, we add details that show how the characters do things, and that let readers get to know what those characters are like. And we show not only the main person but also the other characters.” You get them thinking about how good authors write in ways that allow the reader to step into the character’s shoes, and that as second-grade writers they can do the same thing.

You can also show them how to elaborate the inside story as well as the outside story, and this may be the most valuable writing skill they'll develop—it's one that makes for beautiful writing. So, for instance, you might show Emily's actions *and* feelings: "Emily walked into the kitchen where her mother stood cooking dinner. 'Mom, I really want that dog. I'm the only one at school without one!' Emily felt hopeful. She stood there, eyes wide, fingers crossed, holding her breath." Writers use dialogue to move the story as well as to stretch out a meaningful scene. So, you will want to encourage your writers to put in what the characters in each scene say in addition to putting in actions and feelings. It is by using a combination of these things that the characters are able to pop off the page, not just a feeling here or some dialogue there.

Remind children always to draw on all they know about narrative writing in order to write their stories as well as possible. For example, if during the Small Moments unit of study, you taught children that narrative writers sometimes begin a story by conveying the weather, or by showing the main character doing or saying something very specific, then during this unit of study, you'll remind children of what they learned about ways to begin a story. The only difference is that instead of saying, "I took off my sneakers and ran barefoot across the beach to the edge of the water," they will now write, "Waldo took off his sneakers and ran barefoot to the edge of the water." Likewise, you'll remind children that when they revise fiction, they can draw on the exact same techniques they used for revision of personal narratives. Keep your charts that support elaboration and revision from previous units front and center. Keep in mind, also, the results of your narrative assessment. What do your children seem able to do on their own? What can they almost but not quite do? If you know what is just beyond their reach, then you have a good sense of what you will want to teach toward.

As children do this work, you can do just a little bit to help them create a shapely story. That is, if the story is about a girl who in the end visits her grandmother in South America, you will need to teach children that typically something happens to make this goal hard to achieve. Generally, the character wants something and then meets trouble along the way to achieve the goal. The girl wants to visit her grandmother in South America, but what? Does the girl's father not want her to go? Is the girl afraid of flying? Is the plane ticket too expensive?

## Choosing Our Best Work to Revise and Publish

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Just as in the Authors as Mentors unit, you will want to spend the last week of the unit emphasizing revision. In the last unit, you spent time teaching children how to set plans for their work and then use a range of tools to carry those plans forward, lifting the quality of their work. You will not want to let this go, but instead pull those tools back out, emphasizing to your class that the tools you used in the last unit are helpful tools for all writing. That is, you want children to understand that because revision is a part of the writing process it will be revisited over and over again across the year. Again, they will choose their very, very best and make it better. Revision is a complement to good writing.

You will want to take this time to pull out the charts from this and prior units, posting them around the room for children to reference. Your writers can study the charts, and think, “What will I work on today? How will I make my piece the very, very best it can be?” Then, with their plan in mind, they can go to the writing center in the room and gather the necessary materials before diving into their work. Of course, to facilitate this work, you will need to ensure that children have access to the necessary materials. You will likely want to provide them with a revision folder and a color pen, swatches of paper on which they can add paragraphs to their drafts, and flaps of paper that can be taped over parts of the story they decide to revise. Teach them to use staple removers, if they don’t already use these regularly, so they can make their books longer or shorter.

At this point, your writers will be familiar with many purposes of revision and they will be quite adept at setting goals for their own revision using the charts. It is also likely that many children are summarizing during this time, so that you might want to highlight that one of the most important reasons for second graders to revise is that this allows them to elaborate. If a child wrote, “For Jorge’s birthday, he got a bike,” teach this child that he or she can cross out that summary of the event and instead storytell exactly what happened, step by step. Injunctions to “add more information” or “add details” have too often led to pages that contain a lot of summary—pages like this: “For Jorge’s birthday, he got a bike. It was red and has a basket. He liked it. He was happy. It was a great, great bike.” Help children revise instead by storytelling; help them create little scenes in their minds using dialogue and small actions to let the story unfold on the page. “On Jorge’s birthday, Dad said, ‘Cover your eyes.’ Then he heard him opening some doors, moving some things. ‘Open your eyes!’ Dad called. Jorge opened them and saw his Dad wheeling a red bike into the room.”

In addition to revising for elaboration, writers also revise to draw forth the meaning of the story, thinking about why this story matters and then writing it in a way to highlight that meaning. So you might teach these writers to think, “Which page is the most important? Where in my story does the main character have the biggest feelings?” Once the child has identified the most important or most emotionally laden page of the story, help the child rewrite that page from top to bottom, this time reliving the moment and depicting it with details. For example, a student rereading a story he wrote about his character, Adam, cooking *arroz con pollo* with his grandma on Saturday, might decide that the most important part was when Adam and his grandmother smelled something burning. He might cross out his first version of this page, rewriting that page on two long pages that he inserts into the book. This new version might include dialogue and small actions that show Adam’s feelings.

In addition to teaching children to revise the most important parts, you might also want to teach students to create more literary beginnings or endings to their stories. It is useful to show kids that they can try writing a few different versions of a lead or an ending (or any part of their story) and then think about which version works best. Children may want to study mentor texts the class has read, trying to name what the writer did in his or her beginning or ending.

Once your writers have polished up their writing, you will want to find a way to celebrate their stories. You might set up a time to share with another class or older buddies in another grade, or you might just have them form small groups to share among themselves. You could even add their stories to your classroom library to be shared over time. Whatever you choose, you will want to celebrate all they have learned in this unit.

## Additional Resources

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Your writers have probably experienced a unit in realistic fiction in first grade and already know many things about writing these kinds of stories. They certainly are not new to narrative writing and can draw from all they have previously learned to now write fiction. For additional information, you can refer to *A Quick Guide to Teaching Second-Grade Writers with Units of Study* by Lucy Calkins. For more support materials visit the Project website at [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com) and [www.unitsofstudy.com/workshop-helpdesk/teachingSecondGrade.asp](http://www.unitsofstudy.com/workshop-helpdesk/teachingSecondGrade.asp).

Remember that in the first few weeks, kids are drafting two to four stories in a week. Help them keep their volume high, both within a piece of writing as well as across the pieces in their folders. Don't feel the need to teach multiple strategies for generating ideas or planning, devoting days to a process students know well. Students should cycle through this process fairly quickly, jumping right into the work of drafting and revising. Many teachers have their students write in the third person, the voice of the narrator. Encourage your students to choose topics that will present a problem for the character, and then teach ways to build tension, making the problem hard to solve.

In Part Two students will be working on lifting the quality of their stories. Remember, many of your students will have grown tremendously since your first on-demand writing sample. Look at your students' writing folders and study their pieces for trends that you are seeing. As you think about the lessons for this next part of the unit, make sure that it matches what your kids need. Remember, you are moving your kids up a ladder of skill development. Refer to the *RWP Narrative Continuum* to help determine the direction your class needs.

In the last part, we lay out some ideas for minilessons that support revision and editing. This doesn't mean this should be the only time when writers are practicing these strategies this month. As you have noticed, the work of revision has been threaded throughout the unit because it should be a part of the ongoing writing process. There are more than enough teaching points to help your kids move their pieces toward publishing, but don't forget to take time to study your students' work and reflect on where they are successful and where they struggle, and tailor your teaching to those needs. We included more ideas than are possible to implement, so some can serve as ideas for teaching shares and mid-workshop teaching points. These can also be turned into conferences and/or small-group strategy lessons.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### Part One: Writers Draw on Everything We Know to Write Fiction Stories

- “Today I want to teach you that writers get ready to write stories by dreaming. I do not mean sleep-dreaming. Instead, I mean the sort of dreaming that writers do. Writers dream about the possible stories we might one day write. And then, when we get to our writer’s desk—like during writing time—we often write just the first page to the books we might someday want to write. After we have written a bunch of first pages, we choose one and get started!”
  - *Tip:* “Writers can also use Tiny Topic notepads to collect new story ideas. We jot a few words like, ‘story about a boy who wants a video game and tries to convince his parents to buy it.’ Then, we rehearse it, telling the story to ourselves, and grab a booklet and write.”
- “Today I want to remind you that writers have different ways to plan stories, and as we sit down to write a piece we decide which one we will use. We can choose to sketch across the pages of a booklet, jot a quick Post-it for each page, touch the pages to tell what we’ll write, or say the story across our fingers. Regardless of the strategy we choose, we tell the story multiple times and in multiple ways before writing to make it the best first draft possible.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers don’t save revision for last! Writers revise right from the start! We can reread what we have written so far and, remembering all we know about making our pieces better, find places to fill in the gaps.”
- “Today I want to teach you another way that writers can revise with partners. We can give each other suggestions for making our pieces even better. One way we can do this is to get together with our partner and share the stories we have written to discuss other possible ways the stories could go. Together, we can act out different versions of our story and then decide which one is best.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers know that when we finish one story we do not sit there and squeak, ‘Help me, help me! I am done.’ Instead, when writers finish one story, we start another. We think of a new idea, study the charts, and then write that story out across the pages of our booklet using all we know about writing realistic fiction.”

## Part Two: Lifting the Quality of Effective Fiction Writing

- “Today I want to teach you that writers create characters that feel real, just like in the books that we read. We make sure the people in our stories have big wants or needs. Writers think, ‘What does my character *really* want? Does she just want a doll or does she *really* want a friend to play with?’ Then we plan, draft, and/or revise our stories to show that in our stories.”
- “Today I want to teach you that realistic fiction writers not only think about what happens in the story but also think about the main character and what he or she is like. One way we can do this is to step into the character’s shoes, acting out what he or she does, says, and feels. We can do this work with our writing partners, too! Then, we can go back to our stories, revising or drafting our writing to include the small details we acted out to make our characters come alive for our reader.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers make mind movies of our exact story and imagine we are the main character, living through each part. We try to write down, bit by bit, exactly what we are imagining so our readers can picture it, too. We know the tiniest details help our readers out a lot.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers think carefully about each scene we are writing, making sure they flow. One way that writers move from one scene of our story to another is to use time transitions.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “We can look at ways mentor texts transition through time to help us get ideas of ways to do this.”
- “Today I want to teach you that as writers write drafts, we make sure that each part of our story is giving our readers a clear picture. One way we can do this is to reread and check our mental movie to make sure our words match. We can also read aloud parts to our writing partner to make sure our words are clear.”
  - ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Partners can also read pieces to each other to make sure our stories make sense. We can say things like, ‘That part was a little confusing,’ and then go back to make those parts of our story clearer for the reader.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers show rather than tell how our characters are feeling. One way we can do this is by describing the character’s actions or facial expressions. This helps our reader understand the character and make a clear picture in their mind as they read.”
  - ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Remember, writers, that another way writers show rather than tell how our characters are feeling is to include dialogue. We can ask, ‘How is the character feeling? What would she say in this scene

to show that?’ We also think about *how* the character would say those words and include stronger words for *said*, like *shouted*, *whined*, or *mumbled*.”

- “Today I want to teach you that as writers, we can study our favorite realistic fiction books, using them as mentors to help us find ways to make our pieces even better. We can get ideas for how to start a story, how to make the character come alive, how to get the main character in and out of trouble. Then we can try out these strategies in our own books.”

- *Tip:* Remind students of strategies taught during the Small Moment unit if you taught ways to begin stories by conveying the weather or by showing the main character doing or saying something very specific.

- “Today I want to teach you that writers can build tension in our realistic fiction stories to make readers worry, drawing them to the edge of their seats and pushing them to turn the page! One way we can do this is to think about how the problem in our story will get worse before it gets better. We can think, ‘What trouble will get in my character’s way to make this problem hard to solve?’”

### Part Three: Choosing Our Best Work to Revise and Publish

- “Today I want to remind you that writers are always revising. We can go back to the pieces in our folders, adding or taking away parts to push ourselves to make our stories even better! We have many revision tools in our writing center to do this important work! One way we can add to or remove parts from our stories is to use paper flaps or strips.”

- *Tip:* “Another way is to take apart our booklets with staple removers and then add or remove pages to make our books longer or shorter in certain places.”

- “Today I want to teach you that writers work with partners to think of what to add in and what to take out of our stories. Writing partners help us figure out what is missing and which parts need more information.”

- “Today I want to teach you another way we can revise our pieces. We can think, ‘Which page is the most important? Where in my story does the main character have the biggest feelings?’ Then, we can rewrite that page from top to bottom, using a flap or a new blank page, this time stretching out the moment even more, including details that show feelings and that slow down the actions.”

- *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Another way writers revise is to look back at our beginnings or endings and try out a few different versions. We can look back at mentor texts from our classroom library to explore different ways authors start and end their stories and then try out different beginnings and endings to see which sounds best.”

- “Today I want to teach you that writers know there are certain words that need to be capitalized in stories. We already know to capitalize character names. Now we also need to capitalize the names of special places like parks, schools, streets, and stores, which appear a lot in our realistic fiction stories.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers edit our writing. Before we begin to fancy up the pictures and the title, we reread to make sure our writing sounds like we want it to sound. We check to see whether we need to add in anything that we forgot, or fix something that we think is not quite right. If we aren’t sure how to fix something, we can ask our partner.”
  - ▮ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers reread our stories to make sure we are writing in a third-person voice. We make sure all of our characters have names and that we use *he* and *she*, not *I*, when we talk about our characters.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers reread our stories to make sure that what we have written is clear and easy to follow. We can add in words that we forgot and add punctuation when we haven’t used it.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “We also want to make sure that we are helping our readers know who is doing and saying what and where because sometimes it gets confusing in our books. We might need to add things like ‘he said’ or ‘\_\_\_\_\_ held out her hand.’”
  - ▮ *Teaching Share:* “Writers reread what we’ve written to make sure that our stories sound like the books we’ve read. We can include some of our favorite story language, like *One day/night/morning*, or *Then*, *All of a sudden*, *Suddenly*, *Finally*. Writers know that this language makes our stories sound like the fiction stories that are on our bookshelves.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers can publish our realistic fiction stories by writing blurbs for our partner’s books. We can read the books and think, ‘What might I say about my partner’s story that would convince people to want to read it—*without* giving the whole story away?’ Then we can study a mentor blurb, thinking about what and how the author said something to get ideas for how we will write the blurb for our partner.”



## UNIT FOUR

# Expert Projects

## *Informational Writing*

### DECEMBER

**T**hink about the reading and the writing that *you* do. You probably read the newspaper, some blogs, emails pertaining to school, books about teaching, brochures about upcoming events, magazines and websites and articles on whatever topics interest you. All these texts fit under the broad category of informational texts. And a good deal of the texts that you write, too, can be characterized as informational texts. It makes sense, then, that the school year provide youngsters with ample opportunities to develop a sense of themselves as people who make informational texts.

The unit has several goals. First, it gives each student an opportunity to mine his or her own experiences and to engage in research to develop expertise on a topic of interest. In schools where this unit has flourished, students develop reputations throughout the grade level and the school as experts on the topics that they inquire about within this unit. They'll say, "Oh—Abigail—she knows *everything* about butterflies. She's wild about them." The fact that writing positions a person differently is a big deal. In many primary classrooms, children have had the experience of feeling that they are the author of stories—true or otherwise. This unit has double power, because it anoints the writer as not only an author (this time, of a nonfiction book) but also as an authority on a topic.

A second goal is for this unit to help develop students' muscles so that they continue to progress along the continuum of skills toward being proficient writers of informational and opinion texts. Specifically, the unit will teach students to think analytically about a topic, sorting through the subtopics—the component parts—of a topic. It helps students think about categorizing information and organizing information within a category. Because part of their writing may also be persuasive, the unit helps students become more proficient at providing evidence for a claim and at

unpacking the relationship between a claim and the supportive evidence. Does this detail go with the claim? Is more detail needed to convince a reader of the merit of the claim? So often, when students think about qualities of good writing, they think about qualities that are important to fiction writing. This unit will explore whether those same qualities are equally important to nonfiction writing, and the unit will help youngsters understand other values for evaluating a text, including that of answering the reader's questions. The Common Core State Standards emphasize that students will not only recall information from experiences to answer questions, but they will also gather information from provided sources to do so.

Finally, students will read nonfiction books entirely differently if they, themselves, are brought backstage to think about the decisions that the authors of nonfiction texts need to make. They'll look at the texts written by other authors, understanding that those authors are trying not only to put facts onto the page but also trying to make readers feel, think, and act in certain ways. A book about whales may not be simply an objective just-the-facts account, it may, in fact, be a plea—sometimes subtle and sometimes less so—for readers to respect, admire, and yes, advocate for these beautiful, massive creatures. The picture on the cover of the text was chosen not just because it's "on topic,"—but because it connotes the feelings that the author wants to convey. The subheads not only name the focus of a part of the text, they also lure the reader to read on.

## Planning the Unit

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As always, it is important for you to begin this unit by considering your own students' skills and thinking about the grand plan for the unit. We hope that you did an on-demand informational writing assessment early in the year and that you redo that same assessment now, at the start of this unit, and note the growth that has already happened—and that which has not happened. Notice whether your children tend, for the most part, to be writing texts that are comparable to those that are ranked as Level 4 texts, or those that are Level 5, or are they writing texts that are more advanced? The Common Core State Standards call for second graders, by the end of the year, to be able to produce a text that is at least equal to the Level 5 texts in the *RWP Information Writing Continuum*. Specifically, the Standards call for writers to write informative or explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section. The Standards also expect students to be able to focus on a topic, strengthening their writing through revision and editing with the support of adults and peers. The great news is that students often vastly outdo our expectations if we simply let them know that more is expected of them. Show them texts that are like those you believe they will be able to write (calibrating your goal so that it is a stretch but within reach for most of the class). Think carefully about what students are not yet doing that you need to teach them to do. You will, of course, notice that your students are different, one from another, and some of your instruction will end up being small-group and individual, giving you chances to give individual writers the informative

feedback about concrete next steps that research has shown has such payoff. But you will probably also see that in many ways, many of your students will be similar to each other, and that is because kids are very vulnerable to writing instruction. There will be things that few writers are doing, and the chances are good that they are not doing these things because no one has taught them differently.

In any case, as you assess your students and think about the consequent plan for the upcoming unit, double-check that you want to follow the plan of this write-up. If your students are just writing a sentence or two on a page and your real hope is for them to write more—say, a few sentences on a page, a few pages in a day—then your students may not have had solid writing workshop experiences in kindergarten and first grade, and you may decide that the first-grade informational book write-up (and unit) will better support your students. This write-up is new, and the ideas have been developed for classes of students who are already fluent as writers.

Essentially, the plan for this unit is that students write one book only and an oral presentation aligned to that book (oral presentations are very supported in the Common Core State Standards). The unit unfurls in a more sequential and restricted fashion than is typical for most units. The children spend two (or fewer) days generating possible topics, studying mentor texts, and choosing between possible topics to begin to generate ideas for the content of their book. They use prior knowledge about the topic to make rough plans for how their books might go. Then children learn that revision is important to authors, and authors revise even before they have written anything. You can teach students to study the structure of mentor texts more closely, to learn more, and to think and rethink possible plans. After revising plans for the book, your writers will begin work. The first project will be to create a table of contents, and then to consider each chapter, thinking, “What kind of writing will this probably be?” and then to create a book, filled with pages to match the planned chapters. Be sure to have lots of loose paper around in case students write more than expected. Then, without skipping a beat, your writers will get started right away on the second part of the unit. They will be writing long about each chapter from their tables of contents, allowing them to tap into their prior knowledge about the topic in a big way. You’ll want to encourage kids to write down everything they know on the page, using prompts such as, *The important thing to know is \_\_\_\_\_* or *What might surprise you is \_\_\_\_\_* to extend their thinking. Writing what they already know will help kids also see what’s missing by realizing which chapters are much shorter or more difficult to write about, so that they can find out more. At some point—probably soon after the start of the unit—you will want to teach students to think about the genre or form in which each of their chapters will be written. Is this page on “How to Get a New Kitten” a how-to text? If so, might it help to use the how-to paper from last week? Or does it make more sense to use lined paper and to create a paragraph on that page that has a how-to feel?

As in any unit, and most certainly during this part of the unit, you will want to study some mentor texts with your writers to help them imagine possibilities for their own books that they can try to emulate. Claire Llewellyn’s *Earthworms*, Jennifer Dussling’s *Bugs! Bugs! Bugs!*, and Nicola Davies’ *Suprising Sharks* are just three we recommend.

During the third part of the unit, once kids are on their way, you'll introduce various methods of research for collecting even more information on a topic—you'll suggest that children review their chapters and collect some related "artifacts." This means they might include some observations or diagrams to support their writing, or they might bring in photographs, objects, or books from home related to their topics. If a topic is truly interesting to a child, chances are she has something related to it at home. Many kids choose topics *because* of something at home. You'll show kids how to look at an object closely, how to write from photographs, to search for information in books, or even take photographs on their own to write about in detail and include in their chapters. You might even teach children how to conduct mini-interviews with people to include as part of a chapter or as separate chapters in their informational books. They'll use this information to revise their existing chapters and to add new ones.

Finally, you'll teach children how to prepare their work for presentation at the class Expert Fair by considering word choice and how their writing sounds when read aloud by rehearsing their presentations with partners, and by fixing up their writing to make it easy to read. At the fair itself, each second grader might hold court in a different corner of the gym or cafeteria, teaching a different small group of visitors about his or her topic of expertise. The opportunity to present their work helps children understand that they are writing for a real, live audience. Your class will leave this unit with the knowledge that informational texts are written to teach.

## Launching the Unit

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This may be your children's first time selecting a topic that they will persist with for a whole month (a long time for seven-year-olds). You will want to be sure, then, that your children select topics they particularly care about and that they want to study further. During the first day of the unit, you may want to teach children that if writers are going to be working for a long time on one piece of writing, we sometimes generate lists of possible topics and then choose from among them. In this instance, children will be thinking about subjects they could teach others. Each child can write fast, making a giant list of everything he or she knows about one topic, just to see if they have a lot to say, then do the same for another, and another. Alternatively, they could discuss with a partner all the information they know about one topic, deciding on which one sounds like an especially good topic. Encourage writers to consider whether there is also more to learn about their topic and whether they can imagine sources they could go to in order to research it. Even if they already know a lot about a topic, there is always more to learn and you'll probably want to encourage research work at some point in the unit just so children have practice researching a topic they know well before researching unknown topics. If a child considers writing about fish that are excellent swimmers, she could think about how she'd be able to gather information on these fish by observing her own fish as it swims in the tank, or by visiting a pet store.

Note that we've just shared a variety of strategies a child might use to generate topic ideas for this writing project. Keep in mind that when we suggest these strategies, or any strategies, you will not want to respond by insisting that your students do each of these little things. These are all optional ways that some writers sometimes go about generating ideas for writing. Students could use one of these strategies many times over, or use none of them. The important thing is the goal—that writers generate ideas for informational writing, and some momentum to write about those ideas. Perhaps some children will jot lists of topics they know a lot about and then star favorite ones. Alternatively, some children may take an early draft of a table of contents and turn three of the chapter titles into whole book titles. Sometimes the child can't come up with anything that feels worthy. Rather than hovering over this child's desk, suggesting topic after topic, we encourage you to cluster these "stuck" writers into a small group, give them a quick strategy to try (perhaps eliminating choice in the interest of momentum), and then get them working in pairs to quickly generate some possible topics. You can then help each child settle on one (be forceful—onward!). Remember that E. B. White, one of the most famous writers in the world, has written whole essays on warts, chickens, and commas. No topic comes with ready-made interest—instead, authors make a topic interesting. For children who have trouble deciding or committing, your power of positive thinking and pace is probably important.

By the second day in this unit, your students will each have chosen a topic. Now you will want to help each child make a rough plan for how his or her books will go. Each writer needs to create a table of contents that lists the big categories of information that this child imagines teaching the people who attend the Expert Fair at the end of this unit. Encourage children to write more than one version of the table of contents. You may decide to ask children to touch the lines on their table of contents and to write-in-the-air how their chapters might go, and then to rethink that plan, and rewrite-in-the-air how those chapters might go. Writers can do this multiple times, since each time you give yet more tips that set children up for writing well-organized texts. Often the logic that kids use first is just "chaining": A writer thinks of one topic, writes it down, then the writer thinks of another topic, writes it down, then a third topic. This process results in chapters that are not parallel or comprehensive. Such a writer might write a book about second grade with one chapter on the writing workshop, one on the child's best friend, and one on the room arrangement. Had this child instead thought about a way to divide the content, she might first have had four chapters that were subjects: math in second grade, reading in second grade, and so forth. Then again, this child might have written a book about second grade and each chapter might be the name of a different person. Instead of writing about this whole terrain, the child might zoom in on a more specific topic (e.g., the child who is writing about New York City might decide instead to write about Manhattan, or about the subways, or about the A Train). The child who at first plans to write about assorted topics related to subways decides instead to write about topics that are sequentially organized, starting with what the rider does first—subway tickets, then subway maps, then stations, then subways themselves. Children will not think about ways of organizing their chap-

ters without help from you, so you will want to be writing your own informational text, and to show children different ways you think about dividing your topic into subtopics. The class can then do similar work with many of each other's topics, until they begin to grasp the principle behind this work. Of course, children will worry as they do this—what if I don't have anything to say about some of these subtopics? But you can help them know they can begin by writing the topics on which they do have expertise and you will show them ways to learn about any topic in the world.

As you help children plan for their writing, be sure that you talk often about the fact that they are planning for how they will teach others at the Expert Fair. Because informational writing is all about writing in ways that reach (and teach) an audience, it is important that you talk about the Expert Fair often, and emphasize the audience who will attend the fair.

As mentioned earlier, you can later teach children to look over each of their planned chapters and to ask, of each topic, "What kind of writing will this probably be?" A chapter on "How to Get a Puppy" will be how-to writing, so the writer can prepare for writing that particular page by putting how-to paper into their booklet. A chapter on "When I Got My Puppy" is narrative writing, suggesting that the writer will want to include a page or two or three for story writing. "Take Good Care of Your Puppy!" will be persuasive writing. Once children have labeled the kind of text each chapter will be, they'll construct a booklet full of paper to match their plans for their book.

If some children have additional time for planning, you will definitely want to remind them that it can also be valuable to study texts that resemble those they aim to write, and ask, "What is the main way that this kind of text seems to go? What do I notice about the genre of informational writing? What's different about this kind of writing in comparison with narrative writing?"

This work—of planning the informational books that they'll write—is complex, and the good news is that some writers can make a fairly simple plan and then get started writing, while others can learn about more complex ways to plan the structure of their book. Either way, however, you'll want to be sure that you do not have children who sit around planning for their writing for a whole sequence of days. It is unlikely that a seven-year-old will be able to devote more than two days to writing and revising a table of contents, and deciding on paper for the different chapters.

## Writers Draft and Revise Informational Texts

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Children will then begin writing up a storm. You can decide whether you'd like the child to begin by writing an introduction that draws readers into the topic and helps generate interest and enthusiasm for the topic. Many teachers find that writing such an introduction, in which the writer works to rally interest among readers, actually generates interest and investment in the topic in the writers as well as the readers, so drafting the introduction may well be a good place for writers to start. You'll want to show writers ways that authors of other books have written this all-important part of the book. Some writers, for example, tell the story of when they first became interested in the topic, and

then what they did that kindled those sparks of interest, and what fed the interest even more. Note that such a chapter has an organizational structure that is a common one in informational writing. The author traces the story of her study, and does so in a way that brings readers along on that same journey.

Then again, a writer might address the reader directly, asking the reader questions such as, “Have you ever stopped to think about . . . ? Every time you do . . . you are . . . Did you know that . . . ? It is also true that . . .” Then, having provoked readers’ interest, this writing might launch into an overview of the topic. That overview might well be structured in the same way that the book itself will be structured. For example, if this book teaches readers about a writing workshop, it could be that the book is organized to teach first about the minilesson, then about writing time, then about partners, then about the share. Or it could be organized to teach first about narrative writing, then about all-about writing. Either way, the introduction might follow the structure of the book.

There are lots of other ways that the introduction can be organized, and you’ll want to share examples of especially well-written introductions. When you do this, you’ll be setting children up to write with voice from the start and to remember that informational writing is not just the facts. Of course, to help writers write with voice, you may want to encourage them to try alternate drafts to their introduction.

Presumably, your writers will need to radically rewrite the introduction before their books are actually published after the rest of the books are done, so you may decide to not encourage a lot of revision just yet, and you may instead channel students to begin selecting chapters they especially know a lot about and to write those. Encourage writers to write up a storm, not waiting so that the whole class moves in sync from one chapter to the next. That is, on one day, some children may start and finish four chapters. Another child, producing just as much text, might write just one chapter, but it could be a very long chapter. Keep in mind that your students should be able to write something like twenty to thirty sentences a day, equal to four to five pages with five to six sentences on each page. You will not want the fact that children are writing just one book for this whole entire month to mean that their level of productivity drops.

Once children have written for a day or two, you’ll want to gather up their work and pore over it, deciding what the most important instruction will be for you to give the whole class and deciding on instruction that is best given to small groups. You may look first at the organizational structure of students’ writing, because if their writing is a hodgepodge, with information thrown together without any rhyme or reason, the last thing you want to do is to encourage writers to elaborate, to write more, until they have begun to grasp the importance of organization. So look first at whether the writer has sorted information so that a chapter on “Teaching Your Dog to Come” doesn’t contain information about dry kibble. If the information *is* a jumble, that is okay—but it means that you will want to teach writers to become readers, rereading their writing, asking, “Does everything go here, or does some of what I have written go on another page, or outside this book altogether?” This writer will later need to learn to plan a chapter more carefully, perhaps jotting a list of what information goes into the chapter, what does not go into the chapter. But for now, this writer needs to learn to revise with

scissors in hand, and to use tape. You can look next at whether the information within a chapter is a jumble—and frankly, it can only be a jumble if there is a reasonable quantity of information. A page about teaching your dog to come that only contains three sentences is not apt to be organizationally chaotic, but a longer page might well lurch from what to do first, to what to do after the child has done this, to what to do next, and so on. This sort of intra-chapter disorganization is totally expected, and can be revised in just the same manner as writers revise chaotic organization that spans the whole book. The child needs to look at the chapter just as the child has looked at the book as a whole, and the child needs to think, “What will the table of contents be for this one chapter?” Will chapter one (which really is paragraph one, or subheading one, or part one) be about calling the dog to come, and chapter two (or paragraph two) be about what the dog should do when called, and will the final chapter be about what you do when the dog disobeys?

Remember, if you teach a minilesson to help children think about the organization within their chapters, your students can then revise whatever chapter they’re working on to make it more organized. This will probably involve some scissoring, but it could also require an entirely new draft. Presumably they’ll have some chapters they have already written that can also be revised, and as they go forward, they should be able to plan their chapters differently based on this work.

Another quality of good writing that you will want to support is elaboration, and more specifically, using sources to defend one’s claims and discussing the relationship between evidence and the claim. Help students know the value of specific, detailed factual evidence that supports whatever they have said. So if a child writes, “We learn a lot of things in the writing workshop,” then that child needs to understand that he or she must defend this claim by producing evidence, or supporting details. Help children value quotations, numbers, and specific examples. If the writer has written, “Dogs eat a lot,” then the text is infinitely more effective if the writer follows this with, “Last week, we went through three small bags of dog food in just one week.”

Of course, once the writer has produced evidence, it is important to talk about that evidence, linking it to the claim. You can explain to writers that it is almost as if they have a partnership conversation about the evidence, only they have the conversation on the page. It may help them if you provide scaffolds for such thinking-on-the-page by giving them a list of thought prompts such as, *This is important because . . . You might be surprised to learn that . . . This shows that . . . I used to not realize that . . . but now I have found that . . . The thing I am realizing about this is . . . The surprising thing about this is . . .* and *Notice that . . .*

As children elaborate on their ideas those ideas will change, and so it is likely that they may need to rethink some of their chapter titles. The goal is for students to take ownership of the process of writing and for them to be deeply engaged in a flurry of activity. Children should be working at a fast clip, trying to write as much as possible onto the page, generating more and more thinking. After four days of writing fast and furiously, you can expect your children to have written at least four multipage chapters, and that many of these will have been revised extensively. The writing they have done will still leave lots of room for revision. Certainly, plans for books will change as

students work on them. And once children have written a lot, you'll need to remind children to think again about organization. Remind them to return to all the work you will have taught earlier, rereading their writing to see when things are jumbled and then engaging in the hands-on revision work to categorize their information. Show children examples of chapters that are in fact two or three chapters and demonstrate how to separate these.

Stretching out a portion of a text does not always involve simply saying more. This can also involve trying to write in ways that allow a reader to envision. You may decide to remind children that writers of all-about books "show, not tell," in much the same way that fiction writers do. Children may not use all of the same strategies they used during the Realistic Fiction unit; however, many of those strategies may apply to this unit. Teach your children that nonfiction writers use examples, often written in little scenes, to help readers visualize information. Nonfiction writers also use comparisons to help readers picture things. For example, a child might write, "A cartwheel is a fun, easy trick to do in gymnastics. A cartwheel is like making your body into a pinwheel. You spin upside down and right side up." Or "A butterfly uses its proboscis to suck the nectar out of a flower. The proboscis is like a straw. It's like the butterfly is sipping nectar out with a straw!"

Although it is not a second-grade expectation, the Common Core State Standards do emphasize that as kids grow in their acquisition and use of vocabulary, they should be able to incorporate a range of general academic and domain-specific words—the lingo of the field—into their writing. Help children to do this even when they are not entirely sure if they are using the new terminology well. Approximation is the first step to learning. Moreover, some of your students are now ready to take on more complex informational writing techniques.

You will also want to help writers include transitional phrases to help guide readers and language such as *most*, *some*, and *for example*, which will support their familiarity with standardized testing language in third grade. You might also teach kids to create more sophisticated sentence structures by using prepositions such as *beside*, *during*, and *on*.

At this point in the unit you might teach your kids that writers reread drafts looking for missing pieces, for claims that we haven't yet supported, for questions readers will have that have yet to be answered. Writers ask, "Are some of my chapters a lot shorter than others? Where could I get more information to add to that chapter?" and "Is there a chapter missing?" "What will readers ask, that I haven't answered?" "What parts of this will be confusing to readers?" These questions may sometimes just lead to revision or to adding on, but sometimes that will provoke research.

During this part of the unit you will want not only to teach your writers to add more to their books, you will also want them to begin to think more deliberately about the organization of their information. You will want them to go back to their mentor text, and look now not just at favorite parts, but at what unifies the book as a whole. You might, for instance, have your students, in small groups, study the books they like and then come to the meeting area ready to create a classwide chart of some techniques writers use to unify a book. You can also study some books with a small group, perhaps

with some of your more struggling writers, so that you'll be able to get the methods on this chart that you think will most help your writers. Then over the next few days, you might teach a few of these methods in more detail, showing your writers how to go back over their pages and begin to put them together. You will want your kids to look at nonfiction texts thinking about why the authors of such texts made particular decisions around the placement of sections or chapters in his or her book. For instance, you may want to point out how an author uses his first and last sections to get a reader to feel a certain way about a particular topic. Then you might say, "Writers, you can do the same thing! If you want your reader to feel good about your topic, or worried about your animal and its habitat, then you need to think about where you are going to put in the parts that leave the reader feeling a particular way."

## **Writers Become Researchers, Searching for More Information and Integrating That Information within Their Texts**

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You will want your students to see themselves not only as writers, but as researchers too. You might teach them to rely on artifacts, photographs, and even interviews as they continue to add information to their books. For example, you might ask that students bring in a couple of artifacts that are essential to their topics, creating expertise shoebox collections. A child who might be writing about dogs may fill his box with a leash, a collar, a bone, a brush. If the artifact a child selects fits into an existent chapter of his book he can work the artifact into that chapter. If an artifact doesn't "go" into any chapter, the child can write about it on a separate page titled, aptly, "Artifact." The child can find a place for this new information later, or may even create an entirely new chapter if the artifact feels important enough to stand on its own. Either way, teach kids how to study these artifacts closely, observe them, ask questions, and try to come up with answers. Some of the artifacts are likely to remind children of experiences they have had that relate to their expert project topic. They might want to write "small-moment chapters" for their books by thinking of something they experienced that fits with their topic and then writing the moment bit by bit, in sequence. You can show students examples of narrative writing (stories) that incorporate information that teaches about the topic, such as the book *Pumpkins* by Ken Robbins or the narrative sections of some of Gail Gibbons' books. Then, too, the artifacts will trigger a variety of new chapters. An artifact of a dog's leash can result in a diagram of the different parts of the leash, with several pages about each of the parts and their purposes. The leash can also trigger an entire chapter about tips of kindness when dogs wear leashes. Or even writing about thinking of other inventions in lieu of a dog's leash that might look different.

Think of this phase of the unit as the research phase and imagine your class as a busy newsroom. By now you will have taught a repertoire of ways to research topics and children should be able to switch seamlessly, and with increased independence, between any number of writing-to-think activities. They can pose questions, imagine and research possible answers, observe objects, read books, interview people with expertise on their topic, view their subject through one lens, then another. They can

draw on any number of ways to generate information—and they should be doing so with some autonomy. If your students are not using these writing-to-think strategies independently, you may want to teach lessons or lead conferences that highlight decision making and incorporate charts that can serve as menus for students. As they learn more about their topics, continue to push children to write feverishly, not letting one day go by without lots and lots of writing.

As children begin to feel that their books are complete, be sure that you can actually see the revision work they have done. A complete piece may have sentences crossed out, flaps added on to make more room for more writing, labels added to diagrams, headings written and rewritten, and some chapters added in and others removed. Teach children to reread and fix up their work to make sure it all makes sense, crossing out parts that “don’t go” and fixing parts that are confusing. Children might need to rework chapters (starting fresh sometimes) to draw out the main idea they are trying to show. Partners often help each other write with more clarity and precision; students may work with partners to determine whether they need more information or more ideas in their chapters. The writer can also take a chapter of the book and begin to teach the information to his partner, checking for clarity. Often when teaching information, gaps will pop out and signal places where changes need to happen. Now is also the time for a final check-in on the table of contents, revising to reflect on the chapters that were added in and the chapters that were deleted, and a time to decide whether to create any other additional kinds of chapters or whether to add a glossary of terms.

## **Writers Edit, Fancy Up, and Publish Our Writing to Make Sure We Can Teach Our Readers and Audience in the Most Exciting and Clear Way**

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In every unit of study, children can be coached to use editing strategies they know, right from the beginning of the unit. By this point in the year, second graders should already be in the habit of checking their writing for word wall words and spelling patterns they have been working on in word study. Near the end of the unit, you might introduce a few new editing strategies to add to students’ growing repertoire, such as underlining or making technical vocabulary bold. Writers may also adapt a system to showcase important vocabulary that they are trying to teach, such as putting a blue box around their vocabulary text boxes—if they made text boxes—or underlining the words and then repeating them in a simple glossary. Again, formatting these nonfiction features will help your children learn to recognize these features and use them in the books they read and will also give them a sense of being real authors.

As your writers get their pages ready, they’ll be ready to make their front and back covers for their books. This is an opportunity to again study your mentor texts and work on persuasive writing skills. Your young writers will love to write blurbs for the back covers of their books that persuade the reader to choose their book. “Read this book if you want to be expert at soccer!” or “Sharks can be our friends! Famous author Carly Smith explains the truth about sharks.” You might create a word bank of words

that often appear on the backs of nonfiction books, such as *surprising, famous, exciting, thrilling, find out, explore*. Then, on to the front cover. Your writers can probably do more than write the title. They can think carefully about the colors and picture they want to put on the cover, and how those will influence the reader—just as they are influenced by the covers of the books they pick up—so be sure to return to those mentor texts. In this part of the unit, it doesn't really matter that your writers accomplish the same techniques that these published authors do, so much as that they begin to read alertly and write like authors who expect to be read. This is a terrific opportunity to get your children to really notice how the books they read work. Kids who have chosen their own cover images carefully study the covers of nonfiction more carefully; kids who have made vocabulary boxes actually use the ones they encounter in the books they read.

Certainly you will continue to teach children how to punctuate in powerful ways and to use commas strategically in their writing. You will probably want to create a chart that lists the four or five main things you hope your entire class will check for in their writing. In addition to this class editing checklist, you might even create individualized editing checklists for those who might benefit from such a tool. Teach kids specific strategies for checking their work, like pointing under each word, or reading aloud to a partner as she reads along.

At the end of the unit, it would be nice to give your writers an opportunity to share their writing with an authentic audience. You will want the children to teach others what they know about their topic. To prepare for this, you might use one writing workshop to teach children to rehearse a “mini-presentation” where they tell visitors the most important things about their topics, most likely the titles of their chapters. Students could even make presentation boards and captions, and practice using a pointer to present their work. For example, in one school a child who wrote a book about scooters set up a presentation board with photographs of herself riding her scooter, complete with captions. She put her expert project book on display. She even brought in her scooter, helmet, and knee pads. Then, as she presented, she actually rode her scooter around to illustrate her points! For the Expert Fair, you could lay all your children's work out on display, complete with extensive revisions. As visitors enter the classroom, they may be invited to stand with individual students, and listen to their expert presentations. It is often nice to ask visitors to rotate around the room so that students have several opportunities to present their work orally.



## UNIT FIVE

# Opinion Writing

## *Persuasive Reviews*

### JANUARY

Kids naturally speak in persuasive ways. They give their opinions about the books they read, the foods they eat, the movies they watch, and the video games they play. They argue for a later bedtime, a trip to Disneyland, and the opportunity to get a new puppy. It's a small step, then, to teach children to write persuasive reviews. This unit builds on the first-grade unit on persuasive letter writing, although children who bypassed that unit will not find this unduly challenging. The unit will give second graders the power to use their writing to persuade others to believe what they believe, and ultimately, to take action as a result of their writing, which is ultimately what the Common Core State Standards are aiming students to do. This is a unit that allows students to really recognize that they have a voice and that writing can be a great vehicle to share what they think with others. Not only do you want to teach writers to write with great detail and support in this unit, but more importantly you will want to show them the importance of using strong examples that will convince others of their argument. As with any writing unit, you will want students to begin writing a lot right away. In this case, they will dive straight into writing reviews. Of course you will not expect these reviews to be structured or supported in the ways that you will want to teach across the unit, but that's why you'll want to get your students writing! You can then use these approximations to inform how your teaching will unfold. In January of second grade you will expect your writers to produce several pages of writing a day, and so you do not want the introduction of this new structure to slow them down. Once your writers have written a number of reviews, they will then be able to go back to all those reviews, revising them to add more details to support whatever it is that they are trying to say and to improve them in other ways. In the third and final part of the unit, then, you will ask your writers to look over all the reviews they have written and revised to decide which ones they might actually polish up to share with others.

The unit not only gives students an opportunity to see power in their own writing, but it also supports the emphasis on opinion writing that the Common Core State Standards call for. The Standards for opinion writing in second grade only require that students make a claim, supply supportive evidence, and include a conclusion. In our work with second graders we know that these writers can actually do more, and therefore, in this unit we have expectations that exceed these standards. To see what your kids are already able to do before embarking on this unit, you'll want to devote a day to doing a quick on-demand assessment of your children's abilities as writers of opinion pieces. The RWP has developed a continuum for assessing students' opinion writing and tracking their progress, similar to the continuum many of you have used to track students' progress in narrative writing. The *RWP Opinion Writing Continuum* is available at [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com). You may worry about assessing students' opinion writing, thinking, "Is that really fair? I haven't taught them anything?" Others have asked similar questions—especially the many kindergarten teachers who gave this assessment to their five-year-olds! Rest assured that children enjoy the invitation to think of an idea or opinion that they have strong feelings about, and, when asked, many of them have produced work that has flabbergasted us. We encourage you to take the risk of asking your students to devote one day's writing workshop to respond to the following prompt: "Think of an idea or opinion that you have strong feelings about. Tell your opinion and tell why you feel this way. Use everything you know about persuasive letter writing and reviews." You will want to give them a choice of several different kinds of booklets and letter writing paper as they engage in this on-demand assessment. After your students have done this writing, you'll want to pore over their work, noticing what many of them can do, and can almost but not quite do. If your children worked in a persuasive/opinion writing unit during first grade, chances are good that many of them produce work that may fall in the Level 4 to Level 5 range on our opinion continuum, with notable gaps that you'll want to address throughout the unit. If your students are already at a Level 5 on the continuum before the unit begins, you'll want to think about what you'll need to teach to get them to the next level.

If your school has done the persuasive letter writing unit in first grade, remind the students of the power that writing had. You might say, "Boys and girls, remember last year when you wrote persuasive letters? I remember Juliana got a puppy because she wrote to her grandparents and persuaded them to get her a puppy. I remember how one of the first-grade classes wrote to the custodians to ask for more paper towels in the bathroom. Do you remember some of the things you wrote last year? Turn and tell your partner!" Then, ask the kids to recall what they learned during the preceding year about ways to actually persuade someone to do something. "What do you know already about being persuasive?" You may decide to chart some of these student-generated tips to get them excited about writing both letters and reviews this year.

Most children in writing workshop classrooms will have ended first grade creating pieces similar to the Level 4 and Level 5 samples on the website, and now you will coach your second graders to use all they know from first grade, along with new

tips from this unit, to create pieces that look like the Level 5 and Level 6 samples. These higher-level pieces will show that the students can begin to group reasons or supports into subcategories and elaborate on those subcategories from personal experience. A unit of study on reviews provides the perfect opportunity for kids to develop these muscles.

## Getting Kids Started Writing Lots and Lots of Reviews

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It is important to start this unit with a bang, and to get your students excited about walking in the shoes of movie critics, restaurant reviewers, book reviewers, and video game critics. You may want to gather your kids and remind them how people see reviewers as friends to lean on for advice. You can show youngsters where they can find reviews; that book reviews are posted online, movie reviews are played on the news every Friday night, and the local bookstore has travel guides for their favorite neighborhood restaurants, shops, and hotels. Then too, you might read aloud *Check Please!*, one of the books in the *Frankly Frannie* series, to show students the power a persuasive writer has over the audience, conveying to your writers that reviews matter and that as reviewers we need to write with passion and vigor. Once you have rallied their energy and enthusiasm, channel it directly toward writing, inviting the children to think of the things they like or dislike and to write reviews that will, like the reviews they have read, influence others. For example, a child's review of a pizza restaurant will become part of a restaurant guide, written either by that child, alone, or by a collection of children from the class.

To create a drumroll around this unit, it will help if you display the reviews that children collect from newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. You can also encourage children to interview adults in their lives to learn how those grown-ups rely on reviews to affect their decisions. Meanwhile, you'll want to show children that you use reviews as well. Perhaps you'll read a few reviews of possible read-aloud books, and help children see that those reviews influence your choices. Tell them how you lean on reviews to find the next movie you want to see or decide which cupcakes to buy for the publishing party.

You might want to also consider kicking off the unit by giving children a shared experience that invites reviews. Perhaps they can taste different sorts of chocolate or ice cream (be sure to get permission from caretakers for an idea such as this). Clusters of children who prefer one kind of chocolate or one kind of ice cream can work on shared reviews to promote whatever it is they like best. Such an activity could provide a grand start for the unit and could help you and your children alike realize that children already know a lot about how to write persuasively and needn't wait before they begin cranking out tons of reviews.

You'll find that you needn't spend a great deal of time and effort helping children generate ideas for reviews. They need only gather information and state an opinion from experiences, think about their favorite things, or books they have read, or recall recent places they have visited. Don't worry if their first reviews are a far cry from

those written by the *New York Times* food critics. For example, a budding food critic may write, “The food here is *so* good. It is yummy, yummy, *yummy*. I love almost all of it but the hot dogs.” This, of course, is not what your children will be writing by the end of the unit, after you have had a chance to teach them ways to lift the level of their reviews, but it should not surprise you if this is what children write early on. The most important thing is that you start the unit by inviting children to work with zeal and independence, drafting one review, then another, and another. You definitely do not want all children tied to each other and working in sync under your direction so that they all crank out one made-to-specs review.

Once your children are writing reviews, they will begin living differently, seeing their lives as rehearsal. Students can use little scratchpads or memo pads just like the *New York Magazine* food critic, Adam Platt. These pads can be made from half-sheets of paper with eight to ten lines and perhaps a small box to sketch, stapled together at the top. You might want to cover the staples with thick tape (they make colored duct tape if you want to get fancy) to make the binding stronger. The children can carry these around with them to jot notes about school lunch, the local pizza joint after school, and the movie they rented for the weekend. Figure 3.1 on page 44 of *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2* by Sarah Picard Taylor (Heinemann, 2008) has more ideas for students to generate ideas for their reviews.

## **Making Reviews More Persuasive: Adding Details and More Specific Language, and Using Mentor Texts**

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After children are writing up a storm, you’ll add instruction that lifts the level of their work. You’ll want to use mentor reviews, explicit teaching, conferring, and small-group instruction to do this. Teach children that it is often helpful to look at work that other reviewers have done and to think, “What did this reviewer do that I, too, might try to do?” That is, you’ll remind your children that just as they learn from mentor authors of *narratives*, they can learn from mentor authors of *reviews*. The Common Core State Standards emphasize the use of mentor text to help the students in their writing.

One thing you will want to help children notice is that in order to really affect a reader, it generally helps to write with details. This is true in narrative writing and true also in persuasive writing. You can teach your children that writers select and add details that convey what they want to convey. So if a child wants to convey that the pizza is delicious, the child might write about the steaming hot cheese that oozes over the edge of the pizzas at one restaurant. As children learn to add details, they’ll also be learning to elaborate. Then, to support this revision work, you may want to help children use Post-its. The Post-its can be strategically numbered to match the revision places in their reviews. Using Post-its will make revisions more inviting and much neater, making it easier to incorporate the revisions into the published piece.

You will also want to teach children that reviewers tend to have in mind the sorts of things that are important to describe, whether they are writing about a book, a movie,

or a restaurant. They can study different sorts of reviews and discern, for example, that food critics tend to elaborate on the taste and texture of the food, the decor and service in the restaurant. Book and movie critics tend to elaborate on the characters and setting in the text. Video game critics elaborate on a game's graphics, sound effects, and on what is required of those who play the game. You may want to invite kids who gravitate toward food reviews to gather round those mentor texts and chart some of the kinds of details they notice. Other kids will be known as the movie reviewers in the room, and they can gather similar mentor movie reviews and create a list of their own. Soon your classroom will be budding with experts of all different sorts of reviews and using language like, "I could add some more about the ambiance," or "I haven't said anything about the sound effects yet." Then you can encourage those students to work in partnerships and refer to the charts as they reread and revise their reviews.

Students can also make their reviews more persuasive if they tuck small anecdotes about their subject into the review. Students can use what they learned from the Small Moments unit of study to craft tight narratives that illustrate the example they are using. The food critic may tell the story of the friendly waiter who delivered special straws for the kids shaped like flamingos to illustrate the high quality of service at the restaurant. Of course one of the most important things to teach young writers is that they need to introduce the topic or book directly, state an opinion, and write with reasons and details. You may help them learn to structure reviews by writing a claim, then writing, "One reason is . . . Another reason is . . . Also . . . Because . . ."

Another way for students to elaborate on their reviews is to have an audience in mind. If they can visualize their readers, they can craft sentences with language tailored to that audience. If the review is about the fourth Harry Potter movie, the student needs to decide whether he is writing his review for people who have seen the first three Harry Potter movies or none of the movies, or for both audiences. Or, writers can persuade through sentences that make readers believe the subject appeals to all people. A food critic may write about the long lines outside a restaurant that stretch across the entire block to feed all the hungry kids and adults. Sentences like this make readers feel like they are missing out on something really important if they don't read a book, play a game, or eat at a specific restaurant. You may decide to tuck these ideas into a revision minilesson or two that supports kids to revise their introductions or conclusions. You can teach kids that some reviewers build credibility in their introductions by writing something like "I eat pizza at least twice a week and I believe that Gino's is by far the best place in the neighborhood to get plain cheese pizza." Other writers begin with an introduction that quotes an expert or perhaps a character in the book. Showing your students these options, charting the possibilities with mentors nearby, and providing choice will be important. You can then teach students to revise their endings by providing conclusions that sum up their opinions, tell readers similar books or restaurants they would recommend along with this book or restaurant, if the opinion is positive, or perhaps direct readers or diners to a better book or restaurant, if their opinion is negative. A star rating system or another trademark ranking code invented by your young critics can also be added to the end of the review.

## Getting Our Reviews Ready to Share with the World

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Once children have been writing for two weeks and have drafted and revised a bunch of reviews, you may want to teach them that some reviewers choose a review they want everyone to read and publish it on the Internet, in an anthology of similar kinds of reviews, or in the local newspaper. Other writers only want to persuade a small audience, so after reading a spectacular book, a writer may write to her closest friend to recommend a book and tell the reasons why her friend should read it. The same writer may also choose to write to the author of the book to tell him why the book was so great. Likewise, students may decide to write a persuasive letter to the chef at the local pizzeria complimenting him on the yummy pizza, but also suggesting a change in the decor. Meanwhile, the child who excels at movie reviews may want to study that genre in earnest and work with other movie reviewers to create an anthology. Similar work can occur around other sorts of reviews. As you and the kids discover qualities of effective reviews—of persuasive reviews—you’ll be encouraging children to revise the half-dozen drafts of reviews they have going, and you’ll teach them to incorporate all they are learning in more ambitious plans for the new reviews they are writing.

Students will need to reread the reviews in their folders and imagine where the reviews might go. You can encourage them to post their reviews on popular review websites, in gamer magazines, or in the school newspaper. One second-grade writer decided to make his own travel guide book for Ocean City, New Jersey, which included a hotel review, two restaurant reviews, and a bicycle rental shop review. Other students in his class decided to read their movie reviews in front of a camera and create their own weekly movie review show just like Ebert and Roeper.

## Additional Resources

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Teachers, as you start this unit, make sure that your students are writing reviews right from the start. Don’t feel like you need to teach your students about each type of review before they write their own. We want students to pick topics they are passionate about and can’t wait to share with the world. For additional information, you can refer to *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2* by Sarah Picard Taylor. For more support materials visit the Project website at [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com) and [www.unitsofstudy.com/workshophelpdesk/teaching.asp](http://www.unitsofstudy.com/workshophelpdesk/teaching.asp) (includes a list of mentor texts).

You will need to assess your students and to study what it is they need to know. You can use an on-demand writing assessment to understand where your children are on the *RWP Opinion Writing Continuum*. The Common Core State Standards expectations suggest they should be at Level 5 by the end of this year. This can help you orient yourself to the goals of this unit. You’ll need to assess not just at the beginning of the unit how to alter your planned pathway from the start, but also at many points along the way. For example, in the first part of the unit, you are hoping students generate lots of reviews, coming up with topics and audiences, and writing at some length. If

your students are slow to generate topics, you'll want to teach either whole- or small-group lessons to equip those that need help with a strategy for doing this. If students are not writing with fluency and volume, you may decide to use a timer and to call out voiceovers such as, "By now, your hand should be flying down the page." "By now, you should have written half a page." You may need to gather a small group to nudge them into writing more quickly, and do some close observation of your students to understand what is slowing them down.

In the second part of this unit, you will be looking for students' writing to begin to resemble persuasive writing. You'll look for the essentials—claims or requests, followed by reasons. Then you can look for other qualities of effective writing mentioned in the unit write-up, with an eye toward pushing your students toward Level 5 writing, which is more detailed and focused than Level 4. Meanwhile, watch to see if students are engaged in revision. If you teach a new quality, you should see your writers going back to previous letters—to several of them—rereading to judge if they already do whatever you have highlighted, and then initiating revision when they haven't done this. This part, then, supports revision as well as the qualities of good writing. You will also look for independence. On any one day, some children will be revising previously written reviews and some will be writing new ones. Keep an eye on volume and be prepared to set clear expectations and to plan for extra time during the day for children to make up the missed work if they haven't produced at least six lengthy reviews each by the end of ten days or so of work within this unit.

You'll look also for children's willingness to edit and their particular needs. Note what they can do without help, and think about how you can help different groups of your children progress in this arena. If some are not using commas in a list, for example, you can teach that now. If some are not rereading for meaning, noticing when their writing makes no sense or is overly repetitive, you can do small-group work to support that.

The teaching points below are far from comprehensive, nor are they set in stone. They are meant to help you imagine a possible pathway, one that will need to have detours, and alternate pathways to the same end that may branch out very differently.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### Part One: Getting Kids Started Writing Lots and Lots of Reviews


- "Writers, we all have passions, likes, and dislikes. When we love something, we try to convince others to try it because we want them to love it as well. When we don't like something, we try to caution others to keep away. Today I want to teach you that writers write to share our opinions with the world. We write about the people, places, and things we like and don't like—musical groups, restaurants, games, movies, books, vacation spots, shows, and songs, and we put our opinions down on paper to convince others why something is exceptionally great, terrible, or just okay."






## Part Two: Making Reviews More Persuasive: Adding Details and More Specific Language, and Using Mentor Texts

- “As we revise our reviews, we want to make sure that our reader gets a clear picture of our experiences with the thing we are reviewing. Today I want to teach you that as we describe, we use lots of details and precise language to help our reader envision our experiences. We can use our senses to describe ambiance and foods, and action to explain scenes in video games, books, and movies. We can use character traits to describe people. We may even try some show-not-tell to describe the way songs, books, and movies make us feel.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “When we are writing details, one thing we might do is look back at artifacts, such as restaurant menus, movie tickets, playbills, or video game guidebooks, to spark a memory of the experience we had, and to then add those specific details to the review.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “When we are revising to include details, it is helpful to look at other reviews to notice the things that other critics write in their reviews. We look to these mentor critics and think about the things we can add or try in our own writing.”
    - Examples: “Food reviewers usually include flavors, textures, and the presentation of foods as well as the chef’s name. Restaurant reviewers include information about the menu offerings, service, cleanliness, ambiance, and price. Video game reviewers describe the graphics, sound effects, and required skill level to play. Book reviewers describe the characters, summarize the plot, and talk about the way the author writes.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “Sometimes we need to leave ourselves a note or give ourselves the job of finding more information about our subject. For example, we may need to look up the price of an item, the name of an author, or the spelling of a character from a book we are reviewing. We can use Post-its to flag our notes as a reminder to find more information.”
- “Writers, as we revise our reviews and begin to write new ones, we want to make our reviews as persuasive as they can be so that our readers are convinced. Today I want to teach you that critics can not only include reasons, we can also give examples, specific details (like when, where, how, how much), and make comparisons. For example, we can say, ‘Unlike the Kindle, the Nook is lighter and thinner, which makes it easier to carry. It weighs only eleven ounces and is a half-inch thick, whereas the bulkier Kindle . . .’”
- “When we are writing reviews, we want our reader to experience exactly what we experienced. Today I want to teach you that aside from details and descriptive language, we can also include a Small Moment story that storytells our experience.”

-  *Possible Tip:* (See pages 31–33 in *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2* to see how a teacher used the letter of a first-grade writer to show how she made a clear picture for the reader with a little mini-story.)
-  *Possible Tip:* “Writers, today I want to teach you that when we want to be more convincing, sometimes it helps to add details to the most important parts of the mini-story. We might go back and add these details into a letter we already wrote, or we might start a new letter and plan to add those details.”

-  “Writers, reviewers do everything we can to convince our audience to agree with our opinion. Some reviewers build credibility in our introductions by writing something like, ‘I eat pizza at least twice a week and I believe that Gino’s is by far the best place in the neighborhood to get plain cheese pizza.’ Other writers begin with an introduction that quotes an expert or perhaps a character in a book. Today I want to teach you that writers often try out different introductions to pick the introduction that sounds most impressive or persuasive.”

### Part Three: Getting Our Reviews Ready to Share with the World

-  “Writers sort through our folders full of reviews and choose the ones we want to put out into the world as a local restaurant guide, movie or book review blog, or a travel guide for our favorite cities. We can even create an anthology of different kinds of reviews. Today I want to teach you that writers choose our best work for revision. We reread each of our reviews carefully to decide which ones to publish. If a writer thinks, ‘I’m completely done with this review, there is not one thing I want to change,’ that is not the right piece to choose for publishing. Writers choose pieces that we want to revise.”
-  “As we get ready to share these reviews with the world, we must do more revision work. Today I want to teach you that when reviewers reread to revise our reviews, we often think about taking away parts that don’t support our claim. We ask ourselves, ‘Do I have any details that *don’t* support my idea?’ and then we cross those parts out.”
-  “Writers, we have a toolbox full of revision strategies that we know how to use. (Gesture to the charts the class developed together when they studied mentor texts.) Today, I want to teach you that we choose the strategies that will make our writing more persuasive. When we reread to revise our reviews we think, ‘Should I add more reasons to express my opinion? Should I envision the scene and add more descriptive details to give a clearer picture? Should I add more specific details?’ Then we decide which strategies we will use to make our review more persuasive.”

- “Today I want to teach you that we can revise the beginnings of our reviews to make them more persuasive. We can choose from a few different strategies to do this. We can start by explaining our expertise so people trust our opinions (‘I eat pizza *at least* twice a week and I know a good pizza when I have it’), by quoting experts like the chef at the restaurant, or by asking the reader a question (‘Are you a thrill seeker or roller coaster enthusiast?’).”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “We can also revise our endings to leave the reader with a lasting impression and we can look to our mentor critics to give us ideas of how to do this. Sometimes we demand that the reader try the thing we are recommending (‘You have to get to Six Flags for the adventure of a lifetime’). Other times, we anticipate and answer the reader’s questions (‘If you were wondering where to celebrate your next birthday party, ‘Fun for All’ is the place to host a birthday bash’).”
  
- “We have been working hard to make our reviews convincing for the reader, and so we want to be sure that others are able to read what we have written. Today I want to remind you to use our editing checklists as you reread your reviews to make sure that they are ready to share with the world. You can check to see if all of the word wall words are spelled correctly, that you used your best spelling, that your sentences as well as any proper nouns or titles begin with capital letters, and that you ended your sentences with punctuation that makes sense.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Writers, another way that we can get ready to publish our writing is to think about words, phrases, or titles that we want to emphasize or have the reader pay special attention to. We use **boldface** type, underlining, *italics* and exclamation points(!) to show parts that are important.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that writers try to quickly catch the reader’s attention and publish in ways that are persuasive. Some reviewers add real photographs or rating systems like three stars, five doughnuts, or catchy titles. Writers often study what other reviewers have done to gather inspiration for how to publish our own work.”



## UNIT SIX

# Write Gripping Stories with Meaning and Significance

### FEBRUARY

**T**his unit is back by popular demand. The goal, of course, will be to raise the quality of your children's narrative writing and, indeed, of all their writing. But your goals will also include supporting their volume of writing. Many third graders at the start of the year write a full-page narrative in a writing workshop. That's a far cry from the sequence of drawings and captions that many second graders produce at the start of the year! In this unit you will be teaching to grow both quality and quantity of writing. You will be beginning to build the bridge that your second graders will cross over into third grade.

It will be important for you to remind children of what they already know how to do and then to extend that repertoire. Writing gripping stories (sometimes known as "edge of the seat stories") especially channels youngsters to write with tension. This is a quality of good writing that can turn a sequential chain of events into something that actually feels like a story. To do this, you will want to teach your students how to really develop characters in a way that builds tension in their stories, giving them dreams, desires, fears, and frustrations. Your young writers will soon be entering third grade, where the Common Core State Standards not only require that they write strong narratives, but also that they further "develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations." Therefore, this unit will set them up nicely for the work that lies ahead.

You will have some choices to make. We have written this unit with the intent that your students will further develop their own life stories as they write personal narratives in gripping ways. You may stay on this road all the way through the unit or you may decide to give your students the option of writing fictional narratives toward the end of the unit. If your second graders are writing personal narratives with tension at

the end of two weeks, then you may decide to challenge your students to bring their tension-creating skills to writing a fictional story or revising one they have already written in the earlier fiction unit. But if your children are struggling with quantity and quality in their writing, then you will probably decide to make this entire unit a personal narrative unit. You will also need to decide if you will have your students write only a few, maybe two or three, gripping stories during this unit, doing a lot of revision and new drafts on each. Or maybe your young writers need opportunities for productivity, in which case your students will work on more pieces during this unit. The choice is yours.

## Assessing Writers before You Begin to Clarify Your Students' Needs

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As with any unit, you will want to begin by reviewing your children's writing in general, and specifically their narratives, to determine what it is they can already do and what they will need more support for in order to master. You might choose to give them an on-demand assessment at the beginning of the unit, asking them to do their best Small Moment writing, and to do it in one class period without any assistance. Study that writing, placing it on the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* ([www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)). To align with the Common Core State Standards, you will want your writers to produce narratives that meet the Level 5 expectations on our continuum. However, at this point in the year you will probably find many of your writers are writing pieces that exceed these expectations, mirroring Level 6 expectations or beyond. Once you have located your writers on the continuum, look at the pieces just beyond those your children tend to write. This will give you a rich sense for some of the skills you can teach in this unit.

You will also want to study your students' previous narratives. Did the writer produce a chronological account? Is the piece a focused Small Moment event that occurs over a small period of time? Can you live through the story or does it seem like a summary? That is, did the writer tend to take smaller, more precise steps? Are the actions of the character told in several sentences? Did they include some specifics about what the characters say, think, and feel? Again, the Common Core State Standards do not yet expect second-grade writers to include such details, but this work is named in third grade and beyond, so you will be setting your writers up for the expectations down the road.

Once you have studied your children's narrative writing and determined both strengths and next steps, you will want to begin charting your path of instruction. We imagine that your students, like many of their age, will need support writing with elaboration to stretch their small moments. You will want to help them carry forward what they already know. Note skills that students have mastered as well as those they have attempted, and call upon these strengths to help them set a plan for what they will do next in their writing.

## Using Our Previous Stories as a Springboard for New Work

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You might begin this unit by asking children to revisit the Small Moment stories they wrote earlier. Children might also take out the fiction stories they wrote in November and reread them with their partners, discussing what they were trying to do as writers. You will want to remind them of all they know about writing stories. You might take this moment to reintroduce charts from past units, putting them up in the writing area and highlighting the idea that while we will be growing our repertoire, we already know quite a bit that we can lean on.

Now that your children have recalled what they know about writing true stories from their lives, as well as the qualities of good narrative writing, you will want to take the time to celebrate how much they have experienced and grown as writers and as people. Build excitement around the opportunity to write about the many things that have happened since the previous small moment unit.

## Remembering All We Know about Strong Narrative Writing: Revisiting Our Old Small Moments and Generating New Ones

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As you begin this unit, you might say something like this to your students: “Writers, we have an exciting opportunity ahead of us. We are going to again write true stories from our lives, but this time, we are going to write edge-of-the-seat stories. We will write stories that will keep our readers wanting more, so that as readers read our stories, they think, ‘Oh, no, how will this story end?’ and ‘Oh my goodness, I can’t wait to turn the page.’ We will write stories that captivate our readers’ attention and that have them, literally, on the edge of their seats, riveted by emotions and suspense!” The words you say will not be as important as the stories you read that are edge-of-the-seat stories. *Short Cut* by Donald Crews, *The Ghost-Eye Tree* by Bill Martin, *Koala Lou* by Mem Fox, and *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto are among four great examples—and they represent a range of ways to build tension. You can, of course, choose other stories and may turn to the chapter books that many of your students are reading, for example, *Iris and Walter and the Field Trip* or a chapter from *Junie B. Jones* or *Horrible Harry*. Some of the stories you share might be from movies. You could show a part of a movie that has tension, like the garbage incinerator scene from *Toy Story 3*. You might show the kids how this part of the movie is shown bit by bit. You might even narrate and storytell as the scene plays to give your writers a greater understanding of what it means to build tension in a story.

You will want to support your writers in generating important Small Moment stories, providing them with strategies that will lead them to find the gripping stories in their lives. For this unit, draw on *Launching the Writing Workshop* from the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* (Heinemann, 2010). Be careful not to give the exact same minilesson, but draw upon the minilesson and mid-workshop teaching point in Session II of this book. Since the point will be to write stories with emotional buildup to get writers excited, one idea-generating strategy you might teach is thinking of strong emotions—like jealousy, embarrassment, frustration, or surprise—as a

way to recall significant and gripping moments we have experienced. Whatever the strategy, you will want your students to spend the first few minutes of writing time creating a list of possible small moments. Then, they will select the most compelling from the list and begin to write that story, much like they did in the last unit when they created expert projects.

Because your students have been focused on informational and opinion writing for the past couple of months, their storytelling abilities will likely be a bit rusty. You will want to take time at the start of the unit to help them practice telling their stories, working on showing, not telling, and adding more information. You will want to help them find their storytelling voice yet again. Students could practice by telling their stories across pages a few times, first to themselves and then to their writing partners or to you during their conference. You may want to use many of the shares for children to practice their stories, which will help them lift the level of their storytelling as they go and add more when they encounter a kernel of information that they realize they left out but are dying to share.

As students improve their stories with each verbal retelling, make sure that they have a system for quickly jotting down the additions and changes. For instance, you could teach your kids how to use their jotting and Post-it note writing skills from reading to help them save their thinking about their own writing. If children are doing this oral storytelling work with a partner, the partner could be jotting on Post-its to help the storyteller hold onto her revisions or versions. The Common Core State Standards ask second-grade writers to respond to one another in order to answer questions to strengthen their writing, so this work aligns nicely.

We hope you will notice a fervor in your children, a deep desire to pick up their pens and begin telling story after story from their lives. Children love to share moments from their lives and this unit will give them a vehicle to do so with a partner, with you, and with a larger audience. You will want to take this energy and use it to stretch children's volume. At this point in the year, you'll probably expect children to write two to three stories per week, though you may find that some of your writers will write two to three stories across the entire unit, with several drafts per week, revising their writing in deeper ways. Either way, you will expect the volume to continually increase and to be much greater than it was at the beginning of second grade or even two months ago. At the start of this unit, writers should be working in five-page booklets, with an opportunity to add more pages as needed. As the unit progresses you will likely want to push them to write more, perhaps introducing booklets of loose-leaf paper that resemble what your children will encounter in third grade. You might say, "Writers, over the past few days I have noticed you going through more booklets than ever before. You are writing across your five-page booklets and then you are looking to pick up another one and begin the next story. I'm thinking that instead of moving on to the next story, we might want to try to stretch one story. Before, we used to write across five-page booklets that had a few lines on them, but now I see you are ready to stretch your moments across pages with more lines. You will write just as much as before, but now instead of writing a few different stories, you are going to go deeper into one story, adding more and stretching it out to show the importance of it."

We hope that, when presented with the added space, children's eyes will light up and their hands will begin to move faster than ever before. Sometimes, however, children meet the business of writing longer stories with groans and complaints. Not surprisingly, the single most powerful ingredient in children's enthusiasm is the teacher's enthusiasm and attitude. If you focus too much on volume, demanding that students write a minimum number of pages, it is likely that students will bend their heads faithfully to this task, creating minimum pages that will be just that: minimum. Instead, if you present the opportunity to write longer stories as a new freedom, or even as a characteristic of more accomplished writers, your young writers are more likely to be so excited by the challenge to fill the space that they will begin to write as much as possible across those pages. You might show how, as a writer comes to know more about how to craft a story, she simply needs more space to tell the story with all the details that help the story come alive for the reader. One teacher we know used a well-loved picture book and wrote an alternate version with only half the text, saying that the author might have chosen to write her story this way. She presented this bare-bones version to students, who easily recognized that the shorter story had lost much of its significance and power compared to the original. The same effect might be achieved using your own model text or the story of a shared class experience.

The challenge, of course, will be to help them write more while staying within one small moment, since the Common Core State Standards call for the "recount of a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events." You do not want your students to elongate their stories by including extraneous details or writing "bed to bed" stories. Rather, you will help them keep their focus on a short snippet from their lives, zooming in to elaborate with details so the story doesn't feel like just a snippet. One way you might begin is by helping students to stretch out the action, going bit by bit, blow by blow through the small moment. For example, instead of writing, "I opened the door," a child might write, "I gripped the knob and pulled with all my might." To practice visualizing how each bit of the story went, partners could act out their stories for each other. They can go page by page, acting out what happened and then quickly writing down all the things that they did. So the writer working on stretching out the part where he opens the door might stand up and actually act out opening a door with his partner. Then, the two can sit down and write all of the little things that the writer had to do to get that door open.

## **Pulling Readers to the Edges of Their Seats**

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We don't want children to add just any details to their stories, but details that will make it come alive, making it feel more exciting and meaningful. The next step, then, will be for children to turn to the parts of their stories that carry the most significance. Often we call this the "heart" of the story. This is the part that brings the meaning of the piece home for the reader. Writers underscore the heart of the story by spending more time in that part, giving it more lines and more weight. It is, literally and metaphorically, the

“biggest” part of the story. The longer that part of the story is, the more the reader knows it is important to the author.

Another way you could help your writers improve their stories is by helping them build tension. Explain to your students that tension is that quality in a story that compels the reader to keep turning the pages and makes them feel that they need to know what happens next with the characters. Tension keeps the reader on the edge of his seat! While the heart of the story usually comes in the middle or close to the end, writers weave tension throughout the story, especially at the beginning. Tension builds up the momentum to the heart of the story, like a train slowly chugging and then speeding along the tracks. We can begin by adding a line about how the character is feeling or what the character is thinking. This starts showing the inner story and piquing the curiosity of our reader, encouraging them to read on looking for what will happen next. We might say to children, “When we read books, we often think, ‘Oh my, I bet \_\_\_\_\_ will happen next!’ We want the readers of our stories to do that, too, but they need our help. They need us to drop a hint here or there so they can begin to think about what is going to happen next. We can do this by sharing what we are thinking or feeling.”

Extra paper can also help with tension. Once your writers are finding the heart of their story, you can teach them to use their paper to help them make sure they are telling these parts bit by bit, drawing them out. One way you might do this is by having kids take their crucial moment, the one they probably told fast and in just a few sentences, and then write a sentence per page across several pages. So, if the heart of a story was told in six sentences, a child would have six pieces of paper that tell that part of the story. Each piece will hold one sentence. You could then teach children to fill in the rest of the lines on each page to take them to the next sentence in a bit-by-bit way. By teaching with this mini-booklet inside their larger booklet, you are showing your writers how to revise inside a story. You are keeping them from simply adding more pages on at the end because they were told to write more. This is really revision with a purpose, as opposed to revision merely for the sake of revision.

Writers also develop tension in a story by complicating a problem as the story goes on. Teach your writers that if there is a problem in their story, they will usually introduce it at the start. As the story goes on, they can build upon that problem, adding in more hurdles that complicate the situation and leaving the reader thinking, “Oh, my goodness! What is going to happen?” For example, if you are modeling a story about the time when you and your best friend went bike riding and she had an accident, you might begin by writing that she fell off her bike. Then, in the next part of your story, as you try to help, you notice that she has cut her upper lip and is bleeding. You try to help her up so that you can walk back to your house when you realize that she has sprained her ankle and can’t move. Now you have developed your problem, spiraling from a fall off the bike into a major accident, leaving your reader thinking, “Oh, my goodness! How are they going to get out of this?” You could increase the tension even more by having a time limit—perhaps the friend’s favorite uncle is visiting for dinner and she’s desperate to get back home in time to see him.

Sometimes stories are tense because the person in the story has to try many times to solve a particular problem. They are confronted with a challenging situation and after creating a plan of action to address that situation, they realize that it will not in fact work. The person in that story must then try over and over again to solve his problem. Each time the situation often feels more dire, drawing the reader to the edge of his seat, thinking, “Wow, this is gripping!” So, if you are writing a story about wanting to take a bag down from a shelf you cannot reach, you will want to write about the different ways you went about solving the problem. You might first write about how you tried to get the bag down by pulling a chair over and standing on it. Then you might write about what you did when you realized the chair was not tall enough—perhaps you scanned your surroundings looking for something taller. As you continue to plan what you’ll write next, you might say “Then I noticed a stool and decided to try that. It was still not high enough. On my third attempt, I brought over the stool and a large phonebook. Stacking one on top of the next, and standing on my tippy toes, I finally reached the bag.”

## Repeating the Process, and Accumulating Lessons along the Way

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These concepts are sophisticated for our young writers, and so you will want children to practice them in a few pieces. Each time they begin a new five-page booklet, you will want them to draw upon all that they have learned so far, working at making their next piece even better. Therefore, you might say to your children that the first thing we must do before we begin a new story is to sit down and think about what we know makes for good writing. Then we set a plan for what we will do to help our writing improve. If your children are embarking upon a new story that day, they need to ask themselves, “What did I do in my last story that made it so good I want to do it again? What else might I try?” And, if your children are returning to a piece they began the day before, they might look at it and ask, “What did I begin doing in my story that I could try in more places? What else might I work on today to make this my strongest piece of writing yet?” To support this work, you will want to refer to the charts and to their plans during your conferences. You might ask them, “What is your plan for today? What goal are you working on as a writer?” Then you will likely want to help them set up a plan of action for carrying out their self-selected goal in order to foster independent writers in your workshop.

You might decide to make endings a big deal in this last part of the unit. The Common Core State Standards for reading call for children to be able to recount stories and determine their central message or lesson by the end of second grade. You might ask your children to do this same kind of lesson or message work in their writing, too. You could teach children to ask themselves, “What does my story teach other people?” Kids could do this work with a partner. The partners could read each other’s writing and then try to jot down the story’s message or what they learned. You will probably want to teach your writers that the lesson and the heart of the story usually go together. You could refer back to the incinerator scene in *Toy Story 3* to help teach this concept. This scene is one of the hearts of that movie, and it sends the message

that friends stick together no matter what. You will want your writers to think about what they want the heart of their story to teach others.

## Celebration

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We imagine that your children will write multiple pieces during this unit, and you will likely have each child pick one piece that he or she will publish. Encourage them to reread their pieces to find the one that builds the most tension and/or carries the most significance. Then you might make your celebration an accountable talk celebration. You might ask your authors to read their stories aloud to the class and then give the class time to talk about these moments. If you have done the message work as described for the final part, you will be especially acknowledging that their stories are very important. They are so significant that they need to be read and also discussed. In preparation for this, children could practice reading these stories in their best read-aloud voices, slowing down at parts and then reading with excitement at others. You may even decide to have children think of a place in the classroom or school where their story might live. For example, stories about getting hurt might live at the nurse's office or stories about being a new kid at a new school might live in the main office. Or you could organize by message. Your kids could group their stories in the classroom library by putting together ones with similar messages. Whatever you choose to do with the writing from this unit, your larger message will be that we worked hard to make this writing stand shoulder to shoulder with the best writing on our bookshelves.

## Additional Resources

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At this time in the year, your children have done an incredible amount of writing. You will provide children with an opportunity to reflect on their own learning, drawing upon what they already know, as well as the opportunity to add to their repertoire of strategies, pushing them to go further, taking their small moments and making them into big, significant, tense, well-developed narratives. This unit also provides you an opportunity to help your writers prepare for third grade.

Your teaching will rely on assessing your students often—not in big fancy ways, but by watching the work they do—and on you seeing their work as feedback on your teaching. If you have taught something and only a handful of kids are able to sustain that work to good effect, then you'll want to decide whether that skill was essential, whether you want to reteach it in a new way, or whether you want to detour around it. You will want to consider ways that you can push your kids to write more on the page. Your class may be ready to learn ways to elaborate and stretch their stories onto notebook paper (which children will see regularly in the third grade). As you look at your student work, you will make the best decision for your students, one that enables them to do their best.

As with all units of study, you will want to select mentor texts to accompany your teaching so that you can provide your writers with examples. One text you might use during this unit is *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts. Another is *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto. And, remember that you have your own writing, stories from your life that you can write with meaning, significance, and tension as a way to demonstrate for your children all that is possible. You can tailor these pieces of writing to demonstrate the skills that your students need. As a last note, remember to consult professional resources, like the narrative continuum (see our website for suggestions) and to draw on the work of the children in your classroom. Workshop teaching is most powerful when we respond to and teach into our kids' successes and struggles. In the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. You'll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching through an attentiveness to student work, because the work your students do is not just showing you what they can do or can't do, it is also showing you what *you* can do.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Remembering All We Know about Strong Narrative Writing: Revisiting Our Old Small Moments and Generating New Ones**

- "I want to remind you that before we write, it helps to take a little time to remember and to practice all the things we already know as writers. So, for example, we might make a list across our fingers of all that we already know about how to make a good story and then tell our story a couple of times, touching the pages and saying it aloud, recalling how to make this the best story in the world. We would do that before we write even a single word."
  - *Tip:* "We can use charts and lists in the classroom to remind us of ways to go about our work. We use everything we know about good writing to help us."
- "Writers, in the past we've learned that one way writers generate ideas for small moments is to think about things that we like to do and moments when we have done those things. Today I want to teach you that when we want to write gripping, true stories, it often helps to think about times we felt something really strongly—times we were angry, excited, embarrassed, hopeful, or worried."
  - *Tip:* "We don't just storytell our story one time before we write it. We storytell it over and over, trying to say our story better each time. We do this at least four times, and then we write."

- “Today I want to teach you that writers have strategies for making our writing long and strong. For example, we can recall a Small Moment story we’ve experienced—one we’re keen to write—and think, ‘How did it start? What happened first?’ then sketch or jot notes across the pages of our booklet and then write the story, making sure to stretch out the story, tucking in important little details.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* Refer to the first book in the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* series, *Launching the Writing Workshop*, Session I Mid-Workshop Teaching Point for support.
  
- “Today I want to teach you that one way writers stretch out a story is to set a goal of writing a whole page (or a longer amount that we’ve already written). We select a page from our booklet on which we’ve done some writing, tear it out, and rewrite that page, top to bottom, aiming to make it even longer than the original version. Doing this can help us come up with even more ideas for how that bit of writing will go.”

## **Part Two: Pulling Readers to the Edges of Their Seats**

- “Today, students, I want to teach you that writers make sure that the most important part in our story is filled with details that help our reader know exactly what is happening and why. One way we do this is to find the heart of our story. We can think about the part that has the biggest meaning and is the most important to us and then make sure it has the kind of details that will help to situate the reader.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that when writers want to make a small moment big, we rewrite the parts of our stories where we had strong feelings, showing exactly what happened first and how we reacted, then what happened next and how we reacted.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that writers check our work to make sure each part of our story has details that show feelings. We can read our stories to our friends and ask them what feeling they get in different parts.”
  - ▮ *Example:* “You may start out really happy playing with your friends at the playground until you fall down and hurt yourself. Clearly, your feelings will change and you’ll be upset or disappointed that you can no longer play, or scared that you’re bleeding. By showing our feelings we help our readers understand what we were going through during the different parts of our stories.”

- “Today I want to teach you that writers keep our readers ‘hooked’ on our stories. We don’t want to say our big feeling right away. Instead, we slow down the big problem to create some tension. Remember when we read *Those Shoes*? We didn’t find out right away that the shoes don’t fit Jeremy, right? And we also didn’t find out right away that Jeremy gives the shoes away. Instead, we read pages and pages about all the things that Jeremy does and thinks leading up until the moment when finally, we learn that Jeremy leaves the shoes for Antonio.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “We can do this too in our own writing. We can tell what our characters think about and do up until the big moment in our story.”
  
- “Writers keep readers at the edge of their seats, wondering, ‘What will happen next?’ We do this in many ways! One way writers do this is by making the stories come alive and telling each part bit by bit. Partners can help us envision how each bit goes and we can act out the scenes together, writing all of the little things that we have to do in each part.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that another way we can keep our readers at the edge of their seats is to weave little bits throughout our story about how the character is feeling or about what the character is thinking. This way we can give the reader clues about the story, encouraging them to read on, anticipating what will happen next.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you another way we can give readers that ‘Oh my goodness! What is going to happen?’ feeling is to introduce the problem at the beginning of our stories and then complicate it (make it even bigger!) as the story moves forward.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “Writers can also do this by describing how the character in the story tries many times to solve a problem before successfully finding a solution.”

### **Part Three: Repeating the Process, and Accumulating Lessons along the Way**

- “Today I want to teach you that writers always use everything we know about good writing so we can create a plan to make our stories even better! If we are starting a new piece we can stop and think, ‘What did I do in my last story that made it so good that I want to do it again? What else might I try?’”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “And, if we are continuing a piece we’ve already started, we can reread and ask, ‘What did I begin doing in my story that I could try in more places? What else might I work on today to make this my strongest piece of writing yet?’”

- “Today I want to teach you that writers give our stories powerful endings. One way we can end our stories is by sharing the lesson that the character learns. We can reread our writing and ask ourselves, ‘What does my story teach other people?’”
  - *Tip:* “Once we figure out the lesson our story teaches, we can go back to the heart of the story and make sure that the lesson comes through in that part of the story.”
- “We know that in stories all the parts fit together and the author tells us what we need to know. Well, we can do the same thing when we read the stories we’re writing. I want to teach you that writers reread our writing to make sure all the parts fit together. We can reread one part and stop and ask ourselves, ‘Does this part go with the last part I just read?’ If it does, we can continue to read the next part. If it does not, we may need to take out extra writing that does not belong or add in writing to make the parts fit.”



## UNIT SEVEN

# Using Nonfiction Texts as Mentors to Support Nonfiction Writing

### MARCH

This is the third unit of study on expository writing this year, and one that we think will recharge your students to write with purpose and enthusiasm. By this time, your second graders will have completed their expert projects, as well as their persuasive reviews. Now that it is March and kids are moving back into nonfiction reading, it is a wonderful time to return to nonfiction writing, especially because this unit forges a deep connection between reading and writing nonfiction books. This unit teaches children to write about topics they are passionate about and to organize their information intentionally. This unit relies heavily upon the use of mentor texts so that kids may generate many different possibilities for how their books might look and sound. After studying different kinds of nonfiction mentor texts, children will write and organize their books to communicate information and ideas in new ways. This unit is where the work students do as readers, as writers, and as learners comes together in closer, tighter ways. You might think of it as a time for children to lace all their work together, much the way they lace up their shoes, threading the laces all the way up and pulling them tight. *This* is what the work of this unit is about—the reading, writing, and learning that second graders will be grasping and tying tightly together.

In this unit, your teaching will weave together the work that the Common Core State Standards require of your second graders—to both read and write informative/explanatory texts. The work of this unit cuts across all strands in writing including text types and purposes, production and distribution of writing, and research to present knowledge. The corresponding reading unit parallels this work, cutting across all strands in reading including key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas.

Undoubtedly, as you read through this writing unit, you will stop and think to yourself, time and again, this sounds more like the work of a reader than of a writer. In fact, your children will be doing some reading work in writing workshop. The work we envision you and your writers doing throughout this unit blossoms from what they have learned to do as readers. It shouldn't be surprising to you, then, when we state that as your writers craft and create informational texts using various text structures, features, and elaboration to convey their knowledge, they'll actually be doing this work as readers as well. For example, the Common Core State Standards require that second-grade students know how to ask and answer *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* questions to understand key details in a text. You will use this knowledge to teach your writers how to write to answer these questions for their readers in their informational texts.

Many of the nonfiction books that students read in levels K, L, M, and N have a wide range of text structures and means of elaboration. Looking through nonfiction books at these levels, you will notice several ways the books tend to be organized. Sometimes, a book will explore a topic through questions and answers, such as, *How do plants grow?* or, *True or False? Facts about Birds*. Other texts use a compare-and-contrast structure, which is something that students will need to be familiar with across grades according to the Common Core State Standards in reading. Other books relay information about a topic by telling a story, such as the book, *A Day in the Life of a Snake*. As children read different nonfiction books, you will teach them to read not only for information and content, but also for craft and structure. As you and your children read and study these mentor texts, you will notice the different choices authors make when they set out to teach others about a topic. Ultimately, when students begin writing their books they will need to decide how best to structure them to teach others about the topics they have chosen.

In this unit, unlike the expert projects where students wrote one book, children should write *many* books. Second graders are able to generate ideas and write a book in the span of a few days. As children progress through this unit, you will help them consider and try out different text structures to best convey the information about their topics. Children may also return to a previously written book and rewrite it, perhaps organizing the information differently. As is always true in a writing workshop, children will cycle through this work at different rates and will be doing different things at different times. One of the main goals for this unit is volume, writing a lot of books and trying out different organizational structures. When children are learning new text structures it is often helpful to try out many different structures and topics before settling on a final topic and a text structure for their final book. Since it is March in second grade, your students have probably developed a significant repertoire for generating topics, writing with stamina and focus, and writing with detail. Just think back to all of the rigorous work they did during their Expert Projects writing unit. This unit stands upon the shoulders of the expository writing work that students have done earlier this year and in years past, and gives them the opportunity to write to convey information about their topics.

Regardless of the structure writers chose, you'll keep paper choices ambitious with multiple pages and lines on pages for writers to fill. A question-and-answer book does not mean one question followed by a sentence for an answer, but rather, a question to hook the reader, and then whole paragraphs of writing to answer the question and teach information to help readers understand the answer to the question. Think too about providing students with plenty of revision and elaboration tools, including flaps, extra pages, and paper choices.

In this nonfiction writing unit, the children will not conduct heavy research. Instead, you will teach children to think of topics they already have some knowledge of or are interested in, and write about these topics in ways that teach or help others learn something. You could teach children to choose social studies or science topics they have previously studied or are currently studying outside writing workshop, keeping in mind that children should be able to draft their whole books quickly so that they can move on to another topic and another book. This would be a nice way to give students choice over their topics while still teaching in a way that cuts across the curriculum. Or you may decide to teach children to choose topics that are more personal, such as being a great artist or writing about the country where they were born. Children might also consider writing about something that would be important to teach a particular audience, such as their peers or children in another class or grade. Most importantly, children are making their own choices, not only with regard to topic, but also with regard to structure and craft. This way, children will learn to write with voice and conviction simply because they feel strongly about their topics.

Of course, before launching this unit it is important to gather enough mentor texts to use with your students. You'll want to find a wide range of nonfiction books that reflect a variety of text structures, making sure to collect texts that will inspire your children to try out different strategies for organizing ideas and information aligning with the Common Core State Standards. As you gather and collect these texts, you'll want to take time to study them yourself, thinking about how you might use them to demonstrate different strategies for organizing, elaborating, and teaching about a topic. For instance, you may investigate multiple mentor texts for *structure*, noting the different ways authors organize information. Then, you might return to those texts and investigate the various ways authors elaborate, such as using partner sentences, definitions, or anecdotes. This way, you enter the unit with a repertoire of ways to talk and teach children about the qualities of this genre of writing.

## Getting Started by Trying Out New Text Structures: Writing Lots of Drafts

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When you launch this new unit of nonfiction writing, you'll want to think about how to rally students' enthusiasm. Second graders tend to be fascinated by the world around them and by doing the work that older kids or even grown-ups might do, so you will certainly want to harness this fascination and excite them about writing books that are similar to some classroom favorites. In this unit, students will have the chance

to study some of their all-time favorite nonfiction books and learn to write in similar ways. You'll want to spotlight a few nonfiction books that you know your kids love, highlighting the text structures and features that really caught your kids' attention—remind them how much they loved the way those books were written, how they couldn't stop talking about the way the book looked, or how it opened up with flaps on certain pages, or how you had to turn the book vertically to read certain pages. You might say, "All those books that make us go, 'Ooh! Ahh! and Wow!' Those books that we thought were so cool can help us write our own books!" In this unit, children will experiment with text structure and write books that will leave readers with important information and ideas. Students will have the chance to think about who it is they want to reach, teach, and inspire, in perhaps a similar way that a favorite author or book has reached, taught, and inspired them.

This unit coincides with a nonfiction reading unit in the reading workshop. As children devour nonfiction books during reading workshop, they will have two big jobs to do as readers. The first will be to read for key ideas and details and to integrate knowledge and information, comparing and contrasting information from various books, sharing what they've learned with partners or groups. The second big job will be to read with an eye for craft and structure. You might ask children, "Why do you think the author wrote the book in this way?" Or perhaps, "How does structuring the book as question and answer help us understand more about this particular topic?" Be on the lookout for books about the same topic that are structured in different ways, because these can help you teach your students to inquire about the nature and power of different approaches. For the first few days in the writing workshop, you'll want to highlight a few ways some of your favorite nonfiction authors have structured their books. Demonstrate how some authors organize their books using questions and answers to write about insects and bugs while another author uses compare and contrast to teach about animals in the wild. You may show them how in a book like *Bugs! Bugs! Bugs!* the author organizes the sections quite differently—the text is organized into sections of information for each insect: praying mantis, wood ants, and stink bugs. This unit will inspire your children to experiment with a variety of structures for writing about their topics.

Remind your students that they have learned many strategies for thinking about what they could write about or teach people. For example, if a child were to write a book about traveling, he or she could imagine a few different possibilities. Perhaps the chapters or sections could be questions, like "What do you need to pack to go on a trip?" or "How do you get ready for an airplane ride?" Alternatively, the child might compare and contrast traveling to a faraway place for a vacation with staying at home for a vacation. As your children consider each possibility for how to structure their texts, you may want to teach them to consider the pros and cons of using a particular structure for a particular topic. For example, they may want to say to themselves, "What will I be able to put in my book if I write it this way? What will I have to leave out if I write it this way?" Of course, the best way to figure out which structure is best is to simply try them out and see!

It may take children one to three days to quickly draft an entire book, with the emphasis on getting the words down, moving on to a new idea as soon as they've finished. Again, this is a unit where students should be writing many books and writing with lots of volume. One way to teach kids to elaborate and write with volume is to remind them to use the accountable talk strategies they learned when writing their expert books in the Expert Projects unit, such as "This is important because . . ." or "This makes me wonder . . ." or "As I write this, I am realizing that . . ." or "The surprising thing about this is . . ." As students draft, remind them that they are writing to fill a particular audience's mind with knowledge and to move them to say, "Ooh! Ahh! and Wow!" just as they do when reading their favorite authors' texts.

Because students will generate many ideas in the first week of the unit, and return to generating ideas after drafting each book, you may confer or pull small groups of children who struggle to find ideas for topics. Some children may feel they are out of ideas and have nothing left to teach, and you may need to help those children find topics just by looking around their communities and classrooms. Because this unit also focuses on writing with an audience or reader in mind, it may help children to think about what will be important for their friends, classmates, and family to learn. They may ask themselves, "What is important in our lives? What information do I know that may help other people?" Children might decide they want to write about how to be a good student or a good friend, how to succeed in second grade, or how to be a good older brother. Linking their writing to real-world change may be just the thing that sparks reengagement with the unit.

## Write with Precision, Persuasion, and Power

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Although the buzz in your classroom will be about the topics your children are writing about and the ways they are experimenting with structure and organization, it is important to remember that you are always teaching the qualities of good writing. As students draft their books, you'll want to help them make sure they aren't simply writing lists for each chapter, but are, instead, writing with precision and specificity. We want to teach children to show, not just tell, about their topics. You might teach children to give specific examples, providing several instead of only one. As they write, children should be encouraged to write in a step-by-step way so the reader can really envision what it is the writer is trying to convey or teach. Another strategy you might teach is to use stories as a way to show and teach a topic. Students might write, "One time . . ." as a way to set up the reader to hear a story about a particular instance or example.

In this unit you have the opportunity to teach children how to write with specificity about their topics. Teaching them to write where something is, how something works, or why something is a particular way challenges students to write more complex sentences. You will teach children how to expand their sentences using connector words (such as *so*, *and*, and *but*) and prepositional phrases that lend more clarity and precision to their writing, aligning with the Language section of the Common Core State Standards. As children draft, you will want to encourage them to reread their mentor

texts to notice the ways different authors provide information through elaboration. You might also notice the way authors surprise us or help us see and understand things in new ways. Thus, you are not only teaching students to attend to the different structures authors use to organize their books, but also the ways they elaborate.

As children write their books, teach them to keep their audience in mind as they write. Students will need to think carefully about who it is they intend to teach and how to write in ways that will reach this audience. Considering audience will encourage students to think not only about how to structure their books, but also how to write to teach, inspire, convince, or surprise their readers. Knowing that you are trying to teach a population of young soccer players how to be better players has an influence on the content, voice, and structure of your book. Writing to teach adults all about recess as a way to convince them for more free time would, of course, also influence the content, voice, and structure of your book. Ultimately, this unit helps children understand that all texts are written with a particular audience in mind, and thereby plants the seeds for critical reading. You'll want your students to begin to understand that the way to influence their reader is to not only think about the topic that he or she is writing about, but also to create titles, chapters, and headings that are angled toward a feeling about the topic. You may want to teach your children that the information comes first, and the feelings second, because this is an informational piece not an opinion piece. However, feelings may still be incorporated in a way that helps to draw out what a story is really about. For example, if a student is writing about the topic of coming to the United States from the Philippines and the adjustments with such a move, she may decide to change the initial title from "Being New to America" to "American Schools and the Treatment of Immigrants."

Though this part of the unit focuses on the qualities of good writing and teaches children to write with precision to reach their intended audience, keep in mind that children will return to generating and planning books with different topics, or perhaps different structures. That is, students will rotate through the writing process. So, as you confer and work with small groups, it's safe to assume that you'll continue to teach children strategies to generate possibilities for books and to plan the sections of their books. Children may decide to rely on a different mentor text for inspiration or ideas, so be sure those texts are circulating and in use during your workshop.

## Revise, Edit, and Celebrate

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During this part, children will look over their books and drafts to revise. You will teach children to study their writing to be sure they have enough information and to be sure their writing is clear to readers. Children may look over their chapters and realize that they need to revise their headings, rewrite particular chapters, or rearrange sections to support their readers. Perhaps a student is writing a compare-contrast book about her country of origin. Most of the chapters may compare the country of origin, say Ecuador, with the United States. But as the child looks over her book, she realizes that some chapters don't follow that structure. This could be because the writer got tired or couldn't

maintain the structure across the entire book. Find out the thoughts and intentions the writer had and teach her how to solve the problem. Usually, this means that you need to think about how you would solve this problem and then create a strategy for the student by breaking the work down into smaller steps.

Students may also work in partnerships to lift the level of their writing and help each other find places where they need to add more information or say more inside a particular chapter. You might teach students to listen to their partner's work with a specific set of questions in mind. Does each chapter have enough information? Do some chapters have too much information and others not enough? Do some chapters not fit with the structure you have chosen? How could you rewrite some chapters so they match the structure you have chosen?

As children edit their books, you may want to teach them to reread their books with an eye for writing more complex sentences. At this point in the year, we don't want students to continue writing in simple sentences. You may teach students how to write more complex, compound sentences with clauses and more sophisticated punctuation. For example, you may teach students how to combine elements in a list. You will focus your editing work with students to meet their needs. For example, if appropriate, you may teach children to go on a proper-noun hunt in their books, or to edit for spelling of particular vowel patterns.

At the end of this unit, celebrate the challenging, intellectual work of writing nonfiction books. You may want to celebrate by asking each student to share the mentor text that inspired him or her to write his or her book and how the mentor book influenced the student's published book. Students might talk about the text structure and craft of their final published piece and what inspired those choices, aligning with the emphasis on authorial purpose found throughout the Common Core State Standards. For example, a child might share her final question-and-answer book and the mentor text that inspired it. Also, because you have been teaching children to consider their audience throughout this unit, perhaps your children will think carefully about who it is they would like to invite to the celebration. Children may write a letter to an individual or a group inviting them to attend the celebration to learn more about their topics. Perhaps it is another second-grade classroom, or the administration of your school, or a younger group of children. You'll have to decide if each child chooses an individual or two that he or she would like to invite, or you may decide as a class about the best audience for your new books.



## UNIT EIGHT

# Writing Adaptations of Familiar Fairy Tales and Folk Tales, and Perhaps Writing Original Fantasy Stories as Well

APRIL

This unit was once just an option for second graders, but we've given the unit its own place in the sun because the Common Core State Standards spotlight the importance of children growing up knowing folk tales and fairy tales, so we expect these to be even more present on the high-stakes tests that kids will encounter in years to come. Furthermore, we agree with the Standards that these tales have terrific teaching power. Because they are by nature taut tales with clear story arcs, archetypes, and lessons, these tales are terrific models of craft moves that youngsters might apply to their own writing.

We know many of you are well versed in fairy tales and folk tales—perhaps adaptations of *Cinderella* and *The Three Little Pigs* fill your bookshelves, and you've no doubt loved hearing the familiar tales told from new points of view and seeing them situated in new settings. In preparation for this unit, you may want to revisit some of these classics, and reread several versions of them, too. Children will be doing this, too, in the parallel unit in reading folk tales and fairy tales we're offering this year. Students will read multiple adaptations of well-known tales from all over the world. In writing workshop, you'll invite children to write their own adaptations of some of their favorites. This invitation gives children a way to know those few fairy tales deeply, in their bones. Meanwhile, children will also grasp recurring elements in fairy tales. This unit also aims to use fairy tales as a vehicle for furthering your children's abilities to write any kind of stories. You may want to reread the November unit on realistic fiction writing as you plan this unit because, above all, your goal is to give children more practice writing fiction.

Your children will know some fairy tales, but probably will not have turned the genre inside out to think about its constituent parts. They probably have yet to discover

that things in fairy tales (and in many other stories) often come in threes—there are apt to be three sons or daughters, three wishes, three pigs, and magical people are apt to say incantations three times. They may not yet know that fairy tales often begin, “Once upon a time, long, long ago, in some setting, in some situation, there lived someone with an unusual trait.” When they read, “Once upon a time, in a land across the sea, there lived a king with twelve beautiful daughters,” the words will probably not resonate against a memory bank of similar story beginnings. The rhythms of these stories may not be familiar to young children yet, and so they don’t realize that the main character will no doubt have cares, worries, wants—and that these will probably lead to troubles. They’ll be surprised that the king who loved his daughters was so worried that they’d be snatched from him that he kept them secreted away—whereas you won’t be. And they may not realize that before long, there will be a sentence that marks the beginning of a turning point: “But then, one day . . .” Many second graders haven’t yet learned that in fairy tales the good tends to win over bad, nor do they know that, as often as not, the younger, smaller, unlikely person will rise to the occasion and save the day, usually outwitting the far stronger opponent. Many of them have yet to make the spectacular discovery that the same tale can be told in many ways. Don’t, by all means, plan to dump all this information on them, because the fun (and the work) will come from their making some of these discoveries on their own.

## **Rehearsing and Planning for Stories, Paying Careful Attention to Fairy Tale Language and Structure**

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In this unit, as in the previous narrative units, children will take a day before writing a story to plan it, perhaps using the temporary scaffold of informal planning booklets (made by the child by folding an empty sheet of paper into a booklet with four pages, then quickly sketching the main progression of one draft of the story, then storytelling this several times before trying an entirely different sequence on a different planning booklet). And in this unit, as in the previous narrative units, you will teach children that writers revise before we actually write. Writers revise as we plan in many ways, but one of the most important involves reconsidering where, in the sequence of events, we’ll start the story (wanting to start it close to the main action). Specifically, writers ask, “Where in the sequence of events will my story start?” and “What exactly will the main character be doing or saying when the story starts?” and then writers become that main character, mentally acting out what that character does, thinks, and says, while scribing this mental movie onto the page. Before children write, they settle on one likely sequence and transfer the sketches from an informal planning booklet onto paper containing a picture box and lots and lots of lines, designating each page for one further sequence in the plotline of the story.

As we mentioned earlier, before you embark on the unit, it would be great if you read and reread several versions of two or three fairy tales aloud to your class. This will allow your students to begin to compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story by different authors as stated in the Common Core State Standards. In this

part you will not only want your students to notice the similarities and differences as readers, but you will want them to start thinking about the authorial decisions behind such versions so that they begin to listen and read like writers. One class, for example, may have heard the teacher read and reread the traditional versions of *The Three Little Pigs*. At the start of this unit, you will want to reread yet again at least two (and ideally three) variations of one tale. Even if you will later bring out another fairy tale with all its variations, you'll probably stick with just one at the start of the unit. You'll need to decide whether some of those variations are told from opposing points of view, as when Scieszka retells *The Three Little Pigs* from the wolf's point of view, leading to a radically different sequence of events. An alternate point of view adds an entirely new level of complexity and challenge, and we suggest that for the time being, you select variations that hug the shores of the original text in more straightforward ways. But this is up to you. In any case, if you read lots of versions of one story to your children, by the time you are on your third adaptation, let children know before you read even just a page of that version of the story that you are speculating over how the writer will have adapted the tale *this* time. Let them know before you read even a single page that you expect the writer may have changed the setting from countryside to city, or altered the characters so that instead of being boys they are girls, or instead of pigs they are cats. Even before you begin reading, help children know that any one change an author makes will lead to others. If the author writes a variation on *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* and turns the goats into raccoons, they are certainly not trip-trapping over a bridge to get to a meadow! Will they skitter across the bridge? Or will the author invent a different route to their destination? If their destination is a brim-full garbage can in the alley, are the raccoons crossing a porch instead of a bridge? That is, as you read aloud the third or fourth adaptation of one story, you can recruit children to co-author possible adaptations, and show them how the choices an author makes set things into motion. As you do this work, of course, you are helping children consider how yet one more adaptation can go—the child's adaptation!

It will be important for your children to use the existing text to scaffold their authorship of a new version. For example, after reading the text aloud as we just described, we recommend you give children time to reread the text on their own or with partners, thinking about how they might change the story so it bears the imprint of what they know and care about (the alterations are not random!). You'll want to give each partnership a copy of the text (or one version of it, anyhow) and during writing time, encourage partners to reread and rethink the text. (Don't give them dittos to guide this work, though you may be tempted to do so! This is a writing workshop!) Or, you'll give children blank books, ask them to sketch a version they have read in those books and then to use that sketched re-creation of one version to scaffold the version the child invents. If many of your children cannot actually read the words on copies of the book, that is okay. As long as you have read the text at least three times, they can use the pictures and their memories of the text to re-create the general sequence, which is all they will need to study in order to imagine how the text could have gone differently. Partners could also support one another in the rereading of the texts.

To help children imagine how they can tell the tale differently, you'll need to give them some quick lessons on reading critically. Authors rewrite traditional tales for reasons. Sometimes we rewrite a familiar tale because we disagree with the way the tale stereotyped girls (the good ones are beautiful, the bad ones are ugly, and girls in general are not the active doer but the passive prize). Then, too, authors may disagree with the way wolves or foxes or stepmothers are stereotyped. In a similar way, authors may disagree that the real prize worth going after is money or food—we may want the prize to be world peace, or ways to help others. Sometimes authors rewrite a tale to make it more relevant to readers who live in cities. Sometimes we want the tale to be more appealing to children. Teachers, you will need to help children mull over their options and to show them that one way to do this is to revisit one version of the fairy tale, talking about how the story could be told differently. During writing workshop partnerships can reread a version of a fairy tale and talk about the choices the author made and the choices they could imagine reconsidering.

Of course, most of this work will center not so much on mulling over decisions, and more on imagining the implications of any one of those decisions. If one child wants to explore the possibility that *The Three Little Pigs* be renamed *The Three Little Dogs*, then that child will probably end up wondering whether the villain should still be a hungry wolf. Might it be an eager dog catcher? Would the story still be set in the country, or might it be in a city? Meanwhile another writer may decide to take issue not with the fact that the main characters are pigs or the villain is a wolf, but instead, with the ways the pigs treat the wolf. The pigs show no concern over the fact that the wolf is hungry. What if they'd worked with ingenuity to help the hungry prowler? During the workshop, children will reread, exploring ways the one plot line could be tweaked, stretched, or twisted so as to create a host of other stories or adaptations. Once they begin to imagine other ways in which the story could go, they'll need to shift to planning booklets. They'll probably need more than the four pages they've used in the past for planning, and so you may suggest they begin with not one but two sheets of paper, folded over as described in the fiction unit, creating eight-page blank planning books.

A word of caution: If you worry that children may not be able to be successful at this unit without a lot of support, don't act on those fears by setting the whole class up to plan one fairy tale variation in unison, with every one of your children then writing a tale that the class has planned together. Instead, say to yourself that it is totally fine for seven-year-olds to try something as ambitious as the work you've laid before them and to produce a text that simply represents their seven-year-old best effort. You are asking these youngsters to try their hand at something that we would probably find challenging—let them have a go! Their seven-year-old efforts to draw aren't all that professional either, and you let them “have a go.” Do the same with this unit. This unit serves as a nice scaffold to prepare your writers for the expectation that the Common Core State Standards set forth for third grade, to not only write and develop real narratives, but imagined ones as well.

The work described so far will probably require two or three days at the start of this unit, and none of those days will have involved a lot of actual writing. So as children go about rehearsing (as described above and in the unit on fiction writing), you'll probably want to use conferences and small-group work to channel them toward the actual writing. As before, your children will need booklets of at least five pages, and for most, each of those pages will look rather like notebook paper, with space on each page for about five to seven sentences. You may find that some of your especially proficient second graders could literally be writing on lined notebook paper—fold a page over at its waistline, and you'll create booklets containing four half-pages. Be sure children sketch or jot a word in a corner of each page, signifying that on that page the child will tell the beginning, middle, and end of just the one micro-event that goes onto that page, represented in that icon. The first page of a *Three Billy Goats Gruff* variation may tell about Goat number 1 crossing the bridge, the second page might be Goat number 2, the third page, Goat number 3 (joined in this version by the nearby brothers). The author may need additional pages, which is fine. Be sure when the child goes to write that each page is written a bit like a Small Moment story, with the writer starting by thinking, "What exactly is this character doing at the start of this episode? (Goat number 1 crossing the bridge)—The littlest billy goat looked across the bridge and saw a nice green meadow. 'Mmm, that looks good,' he thought, and then stepped toward the bridge . . ."

Teachers, while teaching any unit of study, you will want to gather with your colleagues to think together about the predictable problems children are apt to encounter. You should anticipate that the challenge of helping children storytell (as we did above) rather than summarize ("The littlest goat crossed the bridge and the troll attacked him") will be an enduring one. You should have a whole repertoire of teaching strategies to draw upon to help children draft and revise toward the goal of storytelling rather than summarizing (also called "show, don't tell"). Remember, you can suggest children reenact (dramatize) and then write, you can suggest children storytell repeatedly, and so on. If you are expecting children to revise a summarized story so as to make it a story told, know that this will probably require an entirely new draft. If a child tries to simply add a few details to a summary, the resulting text is usually not much better than the first one.

In this unit as in earlier units, each of your second graders will write a handful of stories during this month of writing. You will need to decide whether these continue to be variations of the one fairy tale or whether children tackle another fairy tale altogether. If the latter, will this be another fairy tale that you've read aloud and discussed with lots of whole-class work? Or will the children's work with the next fairy tale be more independent? These are all great options, and we recommend that you and your colleagues refrain from seizing too quickly on one tack or another. As is always the case with curricular decisions, each choice will have its own possibilities and its own limitations.

## One Option: Revising and Elaborating Your Story to Create Tension, Convey Meaning, and Consider Different Possibilities

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There may be advantages to spending another week or two (or three) writing adaptations to the one single fairy tale that you and the class have already studied. After all, the real goal of this unit is for children to come to know fairy tales so well that these texts become part of them—and lift the level of their writing. When Hemingway was asked, “How do you learn to write?” he answered, “Read *Anna Karenina*, read *Anna Karenina*, read *Anna Karenina*.” It is arguable that one of the best ways for your children to learn to write is to read (and rewrite) *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, and then to read and rewrite *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* all over again.

If you decided that you’d like your children to invest another week or two working with the one fairy tale for which they’ve written an adaptation, our suggestion is to try rallying them to reread the adaptation they’ve already written, and if they like it, if they regard it as full of potential, then help them realize that real writers write not just one draft, but several drafts, before their story is done. Suggest that this time, children might reread the original story noticing not only the broad outlines of the choices the author made—that is, noticing not only that the characters in *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* are goats, but also noticing the way in which the original text was written.

You can encourage your writers to bring out the template of craft charts from across the year when apprenticing themselves to mentor authors, and to again notice places where the fairy tale gets to them—makes them feel something or see something—and then ask, “What exactly did the author do to create this effect?”

Of course, children will notice all sorts of things—the way the wolf breaks into verse before huffing and puffing at the little pig’s house, the fact that the pigs don’t seem to have specific names. Some of these will represent traits that are common to many fairy tales, some of these will represent qualities of good writing that you hope writers emulate often, and some will just be peculiarities of the text under study. Either way, help youngsters to ask, “Why might the author have decided to write this way?” and “What would the text be like if the author had written it differently?” and “Are there places in my own writing where I could try my hand at something similar?”

As children study and emulate the craft in fairy tales, you will certainly want to call their attention to features that you think are worth noting. For example, you’ll probably want to help children notice that fairy tale writers often incorporate a certain kind of literary language, using phrases such as, “Once upon a time . . .” and “But then, one day . . .” or “Not long after that . . .” You may also want to show children that fairy tale writers often write with complex sentences. Instead of writing “He did this and then he did that and then he did this and then he did that”—chaining simple sentences together, using *ands* as linking words—fairy tale writers often begin a sentence by telling when or where or under what conditions or with what sorts of feelings, someone did something. For example, “Just after the little goat reached the other side of the bridge, the middle goat took a step towards the bridge.” Another example, “Worrying that the troll would appear again, the middle goat walked quickly across the bridge.”

This work with language aligns nicely with the Common Core State Standards for Language that call for second graders to be able to use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading, and being read to. The Standards also expect that the students will produce, expand, and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences when writing and speaking.

Fairy tales are almost invariably structured like classic stories, with a character wanting something, running into trouble, and finally figuring out a way to tackle the trouble. We do not recommend that you expect children in second grade to develop the metacognitive sophistication necessary to be able to think with any specificity about the story grammar that underpins most stories, but while children are rereading and writing fairy tales, you will probably want to highlight just the simplest, most obvious aspects of these stories. That is, you can help children see that the main character has something he or she wants, something the character is trying to get, and then the character ends up encountering trouble, difficulties, and obstacles. Eventually, to the reader's great relief, the main character usually finds some way to surmount the difficulties so the story can end "happily ever after."

You may decide to look specifically at the structure that supports many stories, and to see if they can see this structure underpinning the story the class has studied together. Does that same structure support the child's rendition of the tale? More specifically, you can suggest that writers locate the points in the published fairy tale and in their own version in which characters encounter trouble. Usually, that trouble will get worse and worse before it is resolved. Reading this section of a story, the reader almost feels as if he or she is reliving the trouble. Things begin to get bad, then they get worse and worse. Tension builds. Children can study how fairy tale authors build tension and can reread their own drafts asking, "What can I do to bring out the tension even more in my story?" Of course, in order to bring out the tension in a story, writers are wise to shift into the role of storyteller, saying the story aloud, hoping to do so in ways to give listeners goosebumps.

Over the next few days you will also help children decide what it is they really want their story to show and convey. For instance, a story about a child's trip on the roller coaster can show that the child's father will do anything for his son, or it can show that the child is able to combat his fears. Children need to learn that, for example, the story will start differently, largely depending on the meaning the writer wants to advance. Different sections of the story will be stretched out and highlighted. Again, the decision will relate to a student's decision to advance one meaning or another. Fairy tales usually contain a fairly heavy-handed moral. One story, for example, will teach that intelligence wins over brute force. Another teaches that kindness and generosity accompany (or create) beauty, and that anyone can become a princess. These stories, then, provide children with chances to practice highlighting a meaning or moral. You will help children make decisions as to what moral they might wish to teach in their stories.

You'll decide if there are other aspects of published fairy tales that you want to highlight. Make this decision by reading over student drafts and asking, "What gets in the way of these being better?" and "What do many students seem to be on the

brink of being able to do?” Look over the narrative writing continuum and think about where most of your students seem to fall at this time of the year, and look ahead to notice the skills that writers who are working at just a bit more advanced level demonstrate. For example, if many writers seem to write narratives like those in Level 4 on the narrative continuum, you may decide that one way to help them become stronger writers is to help them realize that a fairy tale, like any story, contains just a couple of scenes and those scenes can be written as Small Moment stories.

As you do this, remember that qualities of good writing need to be turned into processes. So, for example, if it seems to you that all the characters in many of your children’s stories seem similar to each other, you might suggest to writers that they act out a scene from a child’s story during a partnership share, thinking carefully about how each character walks or talks. The goats trip-trap across the bridge—but how does the troll move? Surely he doesn’t trip-trap! Once children have acted out the ways that one character moves differently than another, then they can reach for precise accurate words to depict what they envision.

Of course, instead of suggesting children write entirely new drafts of their fairy tale rendition, you might have encouraged them to write very different versions of the familiar story. As part of this, you could teach them to borrow Jon Scieszka’s technique of telling the same tale through the point of view of a different character.

### **Another Option: Crafting Your Own Version of an Old Tale**

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Then again, teachers could decide on a totally different route through this unit. You could suggest that after children all write a variation of a fairy tale that you read to them, then they can continue to do the same work with another fairy tale, only this time working more independently. The second fairy tale could be one that each child chooses from those he or she knows or from another two or three that you have read aloud to the class. In either instance, writers who can do so could also do some of their own reading and research. Some teachers have created reading clubs, gathering children around different fairy tales. If the teacher has a couple of versions of *Jack and the Beanstalk* that children who can read level H/I books can read, then she might see if some readers who could handle that book (and some of their friends) might want to try writing a new variation of that tale. If she has an audio tape of one Cinderella book and could recruit someone to read a second version of that tale aloud to a small group, then that group, too, would be well on their way. The plans that a teacher decides upon will obviously be shaped by the second graders’ reading abilities and by the classroom collection of fairy tale books.

If teachers opt to encourage second graders to tackle a second and perhaps even a third fairy tale, writing new versions of each, it will still be important to leave time for some of the revision work described above. Perhaps before the last week of the unit, children can be invited to reread all the fairy tales they have written, selecting their best for further revisions—and those revisions can incorporate some of what was described earlier in this write-up.

## A Far-Out Option for the Final Week: Fantasy

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If children have been revising all along, there is another alternative for the final week of this unit. You may want to give children a chance to write their own imaginative fiction, relying on everything they know from the work with realistic fiction and also the work with fairy tales. Do you know that feeling you get when you browse a bookstore and spot a book that feels like an invitation? You pick it up and have this palpable sense of excitement turning the pages. “My students could write a story like this!” you think. For the final week of the unit, then, one option is to lay books side by side that feel a bit like that: Ella George Lyons’ beautiful text *The Star Fisher*, for example, and Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*, or Anthony Browne’s *Gorilla*. You can decide—there are lots of options. Choose books that are as lean and beautifully written as possible, and that exemplify much of what children have learned about Small Moment writing and yet are not bound by that. Choose books, too, that carry many of the traits of fairy tales and yet are not fairy tales. Then you might say to children, “For our very final week before vacation, let’s do something magical, something special. Let’s try our hands at a project second graders don’t usually do—writing imaginary fiction.”

Point out to children that very often, the first few pages of an imaginary story reads as if it is realistic fiction. The start of the story usually shows a character, grounded in the real world, who has a problem. Then something happens, something very specific and precise and sensory. And that micro-event ignites a story that reads as if it is true, that spins out just like a Small Moment story or a fairy tale, but that in fact contains magic. When children write the magical sections of their text, teach them something Madeleine L’Engle once said. To summarize, “If you want people to believe that elephants are flying overhead, you need to be especially precise. Don’t say, ‘I looked up and saw elephants flying overhead.’ Instead say, ‘I just looked up and saw seven elephants—six grown-ups and a baby—fly through the gap in those trees over there. They were all in a line, the baby first. Then they flew around that building.’”

Be sure that you remind children of all they know—that they use the planning booklets, or do some variation of that work with the booklets in which they will be writing. Be sure they act out the story and tell it several times before they write it, and that you help them storytell rather than summarize—and absolutely encourage them to start page one by having the character do a very small (smaller than they think) action or say something. Remind children of the power of literary language and those beautiful phrases they learned from studying fairy tales. Help them remember that stories tend to involve a character who encounters some sort of trouble, and who finds the trouble getting worse and worse before something happens to resolve it. Above all, be sure that children are not moving along in sync with every one of them sketching out how their story will go on one day, and trying three leads on the next day, and writing the whole story fast and strong on the next day. Let children internalize how the process unrolls and progress at their own pace! Let them draw from your charts and their knowledge, becoming their own decision makers, becoming independent writers.

One final point: This week will culminate five months of work with narrative and you should see evidence of all that children have internalized. You will probably want to end the unit with another day of assessment, so go back to the start of this curricular calendar and reread the directions for assessing narrative writing. Give children the same amount of time, and once again, refrain from hints and reminders.

Will this last part of the unit ignite energy? Will it lead children to grow a bit taller and stronger as writers? Those of us at the TCRWP are dying to hear—send us your news and your students’ writing! If you email them to us, we’ll share them with the rest of the community: [contact@readingandwritingproject.com](mailto:contact@readingandwritingproject.com).

## Additional Resources

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As you approach this unit it will be important for you to read the entire write-up and not just the teaching points below, because kids learn through the work they do, and the write-up is jam-packed with ideas and teaching to help you organize and create opportunities for children to engage in work that matters. The unit write-up can help you issue the generous invitation that rallies kids not only to work with heart and soul, but to also engage in deliberate practice, trying to get better at specific skills that the unit aims to highlight.

In the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. Keep in mind that your students are working toward a Level 5 and in some cases a Level 6 on the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum*. Look at your student work and decide the best path you need to take with your kids. This part of our teaching relies on you assessing your students often—not in formal ways, but by watching the work they do—and on you seeing their work as feedback on your teaching. If you have taught something and only a handful of kids are able to sustain that work to good effect, then you’ll want to decide whether that skill was essential, whether you want to reteach it in a new way, or whether you want to detour around it. You’ll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching through an attentiveness to student work, because the work your students do is not just showing you what they can or can’t do, it is also showing you what *you* can do.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Rehearsing and Planning for Stories, Paying Careful Attention to Fairy Tale Language and Structure**

- “Writers, we have been reading many different adaptations of fairy tales and we have noticed that each author has given the story their own spin. Some authors changed the characters—turning girls to boys or people to animals. Others have changed the setting—moving the story from a kingdom far away to the middle

of a big city. Well, today I'm going to teach how you can get started planning your very own adaptation. One thing that writers do is think, 'What would I like to change?' and 'How will the change affect all the parts of my story?' We then plan out our stories, either in a booklet or storyboard."

- ▶ *Tip:* "We may do quick sketches or jottings to remember all the parts of the story that we want to include."

- ▶ *Tip:* "Writers, we revise our plans or plan another adaptation, then another, playing with different ideas before we get started in writing. As we revise our plans, we think 'Where exactly will my story begin?' and 'What will my character be saying and doing?' so that we can begin our stories close to the main action."

- "Writers, today I want to teach you that you have to make many important decisions as you are writing your fairy tale. Writers ask ourselves, 'Why am I rewriting this fairy tale?' 'Who am I writing it for?' and 'What is it, exactly, that I am trying to say?' One thing that we can do to answer these questions as we plan and write our own is to *reread*, *re-study*, and *re-think* the fairy tales we've been studying with our partners. We study and talk about the choices the author made to change their version and how we might revise our plans or stories so that our adaptations are meaningful."

- ▶ *Example:* "Sometimes, we rewrite a familiar tale because we disagree with the way the tale has stereotyped girls, with the good ones always being beautiful and the bad ones always being ugly, or authors may disagree with the way wolves, foxes, or stepmothers are stereotyped as nasty, evil, and mean. Sometimes authors rewrite a tale so that it makes more sense to readers who live in different places or in other cultures."

- ▶ *Tip:* "Writers, remember, as we are exploring ways our adaptations could be tweaked, stretched, or twisted, we can come up with a few different story ideas. Once we imagine other ways the story could go, we can create other mini-booklets to plan through our ideas—we may even need many pages! If this happens, begin with two sheets of paper folded in half, and in half again, creating eight (or more) page-long planning books."

- "Writers, we have come up with lots of plans for our adaptations and we are ready to get started in our writing. Today I want to teach you that we choose one of our plans, take the number of pages we need to make a book, transfer our ideas from our planning booklets by jotting a note in the margin or sketching a quick picture on each page, and begin writing using everything we know about storytelling and fairy tale language."

- ▶ *Tip:* "Writers, we are storytellers, not summarizers! We need to use everything we know from Small Moments and realistic fiction, including to *show not tell* as we write our story. We use action, dialogue, and internal thoughts. So, imagine that you are the character. Act out the first scene, say what the

character would say, think like you are the character and use lots of action. Then, add it to your writing."

- ▶ *Tip: "Writers we can act out the scenes to our tale and then storytell it again and again, both to ourselves and to our partners. After we have retold our stories many times, we have a clearer idea of what to put onto the page when we go to write."*

## **Part Two: One Option: Revising and Elaborating Your Story to Create Tension, Convey Meaning, and Consider Different Possibilities**

- "Writers, as you finish up your writing, it is important to reread what you have done and make a plan for what you will do next. Today I want to teach you that we reread and decide if we should rewrite the same story again, trying to make it stronger. We can think about craft that we have learned from other authors in other units and we can even go back to our fairy tale books to look for things that those authors have done that we may want to try out as well."
  - ▶ *Tip: "Writers, as we begin to notice the things that fairy tale authors do, we pay close attention to the language they use to write. Notice how the stories often begin with *Once upon a time*, and when another scene begins, authors use words like *But then one day* or *Not long after that . . .*"*
  - ▶ *Tip: "Writers, as we continue to notice the language in fairy tales, pay close attention to the sentences. Notice that they are not short and simple sentences, rather, they are longer. They might sound like two sentences linked by words like *and*, *so*, *but*, and *because*."*
  - ▶ *Tip: "Writers, as we continue to notice the fairy tale language, also notice that sentences begin by telling when or where or under what conditions, or with what sorts of feelings, someone did something." (For example, "*Just after the little goat reached the other side of the bridge*, the middle goat took a step towards the bridge." Another example: "*Worrying that the troll would appear again*, the middle goat walked quickly across the bridge.")*
- "Writers, as you have been reading and rereading fairy tales like a writer, you might have noticed that the structure to the tales is similar. Today I want to teach you that as we rewrite or revise our fairy tales, we try to use a similar structure. We introduce the main character and then create a wish or a problem for that character. We may include a bit of magic or trickery that either complicates things or helps to solve matters. The trouble grows for the character, getting worse until the end, when it is resolved and then, we tell our reader, the main character lives 'happily ever after.'"
  - ▶ *Tip: "Writers, as you are revising, remember to stretch out the problem and build tension—use lots of action, dialogue and show-not-tell to keep the reader nervous and on the edge of her seat."*

► *Tip: “Writers, as you stretch out your stories and write scene after scene, remember to make each one like a Small Moment story. Act it out with your partner, notice how the characters walk and talk, and use precise language to storytell.”*

■ “Writers, just like before, during, and after we read books we often think, ‘What is the author trying to teach me? What am I supposed to learn?’ When we *write*, we set out to teach our readers something. Today, I want to teach you that fairy tale writers also teach readers a lesson. We can think, ‘What do I want my reader to learn?’ Maybe we want to teach that intelligence wins over force, or that kindness and generosity can make anyone a princess. We can read our stories with our partners and give each other advice on how to make sure each of our stories has a lesson.”

■ “Writers, we have been writing some great adaptations to our fairy tales. Today, I want to teach you that one way to adapt a story is by writing a whole new version of the fairy tale, that is told from a different character’s point of view (like *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*).”

### **Another Option for Part Two: Crafting Your Own Version of an Old Tale**

■ “Writers, we can think of other fairy tales that we know well or we can read a few adaptations of a new fairy tale with our partner and try our hand at a whole new tale. Today I want to teach you that as we get started we use everything we have learned about how to write—we use our planning booklets to sketch how our fairy tale will go, we work with our partners for advice, then we storytell and write each scene like a small moment, using fairy tale language and tension.”

### **Part Three: A Far-Out Option for the Final Week: Fantasy**

■ “Writers, we have learned a lot from realistic fiction and this month, from fairy tales. We can take what we’ve learned from both units and try out a new type of writing—fantasy. Today, I want to teach you that a fantasy story, much like realistic fiction, features characters who have a problem. Then something happens . . . there’s a bit of magic and sometimes an imaginary setting (like a world where people can fly, as in *Harry Potter*, or one that is accessible through a wardrobe, as in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*).”

► *Tip: “Writers, as you think of your ideas, remember what we have learned about planning and how we use planning booklets to sketch out our ideas a few times before we transfer our ideas into a book.”*

- “Writers, as we get started writing our fantasy stories, we can act out the parts and storytell each part over and over again with our partner. Today, I want to teach you that when we act out the parts, we use dialogue and very small actions and we put the words and mini-actions into our writing with precise language to make a clear movie for the reader.”
- “Writers, we stretch out our fantasy stories just like our realistic fiction stories and fairy tales. Today, I want to remind you that our characters encounter trouble when they try to solve their problems or get what they want. The problem often gets worse and worse before it gets better. We include obstacles that give the reader that ‘uh-oh, now what?’ feeling.”
  - *Tip:* “Remember, we are writing fantasy, so think ‘outside the box’ about how to use elements of magic to help your characters deal with the problems they face.”
  - *Tip:* “Writers, remember that everything we have learned about tension, craft, and ways to stretch the problem and say more are all on our classroom charts, old and new. Make sure you look at those charts and make good choices in your writing.”



## UNIT NINE

# Informational Writing about Science

### MAY

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We have several goals for the upcoming unit of study in writing workshop. First, we want children to use writing to explore an aspect of science that is essential. Last year, we wrote this unit as if children were studying plant diversity. This year we are writing it as if they are studying forces and motion. The reason we're channeling you toward forces and motion rather than plants is that we hope this unit provides children with opportunities to use writing to engage in the work that scientists do—developing and testing hypotheses, gathering data, and studying information for patterns. This unit aligns with the informational writing that the Common Core State Standards require, allowing second graders to participate in shared research around a common topic to then influence their writing. Plants grow slowly, over time, whereas balls roll or bounce in a matter of minutes, so the topic of forces and motion seemed more conducive to fruitful, expeditious experimentation. But the topic that you and your children study together is your choice. You can easily use the basic outline of this unit to support studies of any topic that you believe will be engaging for your kids and will bring them toward an understanding of one of the concepts that is essential to science.

This unit builds on the energy and enthusiasm children carry about the world around them. You have probably noticed that the children in your classroom are eager to learn about their world. They gather leaves as they change colors from summer to fall, collect rocks and seashells, and come to school excited to talk, draw, and write about the things that surround them. Before now, your second graders will presumably have been engaged in some science studies and workshops, and they will probably have learned to observe closely, to ask big questions, and to follow procedures to pursue those questions. You will now channel their burgeoning interest in science into the writing workshop, showing learners that writing need not be an end in and of itself, but that it can also be a tool for learning.

You will want to approach this unit with a grand plan for the overall design of it. As in many other K–2 units, children will cycle through repeated tries at doing the work of the unit, but this time the work is not rehearsing, drafting, revising, and editing writing so much as it is writing to record, to question, to hypothesize and observe, and finally, writing to teach others. As children engage in this work repeatedly, you'll teach in ways that lift the level of what they are doing, so that over time they will use more sophisticated moves as they record, question, experiment, and teach.

Obviously, the unit breaks with tradition in that it is a hybrid—it is science and writing rolled into one. Usually your writing workshops have been an hour long and have begun with a minilesson, then included a big chunk of time for kids to write, and ended with time for children to share their writing with partners. In this hybrid science-writing workshop, however, we hope that at least twice a week you'll be able to extend the hour-long writing workshop so that it is ninety minutes for the hybrid of science and writing. Although each day will still begin with a minilesson, the minilessons will not all just invite kids to do the work that writers do, they will also invite kids to do the work that scientists do. And when children go off to their work spots and begin working, they might well be wrapping balls in tinfoil to see if the foil alters the height of the bounce, or rolling square and circular objects down an inclined plane, recording the relative speeds.

Of course, this is still a writing workshop as well as a science workshop. Imagine the hybridity by thinking that on the one hand, kids will at some points be engaged in scientific processes of hypothesizing, and on the other hand, they will be engaged in writing processes of recording observations and drawing conclusions aligning with the Common Core State Standards. Imagine your two hands, folded together, with fingers interlocked. In just that way, your youngsters will shift from doing the work of being a scientist to doing the work of being a writer. In the first part of the unit, children will study a whole-class topic during a daily science-writing workshop, and will write, sketch, and jot questions in order to record and grow their thinking. They'll conduct experiments, first as a class and then on their own, and learn to write second-grade versions of laboratory reports, complete with hypotheses, observations, diagrams, and conclusions. They will also write how-to, or procedural, texts as a science student does after working on an experiment. These records of work done will teach others what the young researcher did so others can replicate the experiment and see if they get similar results. This unit, then, provides children with purposes for writing—and those purposes are diverse, so the writing that students will be doing will also be diverse. Children will draw on much of what they know about different kinds of—and purposes for—writing in this unit, using aspects of what they have learned from writing how-to's, persuasive texts, and nonfiction books. Don't be too concerned if your children's initial writing feels sparse. Like you, they will need a bit of time to find their footing in this hybrid unit and learn to balance scientific inquiry with the writing process.

In the second part of the unit, children will launch into their own experiments, writing proposals, trying experiments out, and writing them up. You'll build on what

children learned to do in Part One, teaching them new ways to record information, to write more detailed how-to texts, and to explore questions in writing.

In the third and final part, children will compile all the information they have learned about their topics and make informational books that teach others how to conduct similar experiments. These will include an introduction, information about the topic, a description of the procedure, talks about their daily journey, and their conclusions. Children may select to write up one experiment that they tried or a series of experiments that they tried to help answer a question aligning with the Common Core State Standards. We're recommending *I'm a Scientist: Kitchen* (DK Publishing, 2010) as one possible mentor text for the final product of this unit.

## Preparing for the Unit

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The very first preparation you will probably want to do for this unit is to decide on a whole-class topic, preferably one that aligns with your science standards. This is a critical choice. Remember that your whole class will be living like scientists around and inside this topic for the whole month. We're suggesting Forces and Motion, as it aligns with second-grade science standards and offers many component parts (gravity, magnets, inclined planes, levers, and so on) for students to study. You will, of course, want to consult your library when making a topic choice, since you'll need nonfiction books on the topic to serve as writing mentors and sources of information. You'll also want to consider choosing a topic about which your children have some prior knowledge, or which they can study simultaneously in science workshop. Whatever the topic, you'll want to ask yourself, Does this topic have *breadth*? In other words, will you be able to divide the topic into plenty of component parts for children to study in greater detail over the course of the month? Can this topic accommodate a multitude of in-class experiments? For example, a topic like "The Life Cycle of a Butterfly" might be too narrow a topic for a whole-class inquiry because it is hard to imagine a whole class writing about nothing but this for the length of an entire month. It may be even more difficult to imagine the kinds of experiments they'd create to explore their burgeoning questions and hypotheses.

A second thing to keep your eye on while choosing a whole-class topic is whether it is localized to students' real environments, in other words, accessible to bring into the classroom. Keep in mind that you want children living the real life of scientists this month and so the topic ought to provide actual chances for them to make observations, conduct experiments, and note and describe findings. Much as you would like for kids to read up on their topics, in this month you're aiming for kids to *live out* the scientific method and not just summarize what they find already written in reference books. In the end, you want your scientists to climb inside their topic and live with it, channeling their natural sense of play into the act of being a scientist.

You'll want to plan to teach science in your own classroom or collaborate with the science teacher and chalk out several possible inquiries and experiments that children might pursue this month on the chosen topic. You'll also need books—ones that can

serve as mentor texts for the kind of writing you hope children will produce, books that serve as references, and books with diagrams and illustrations for children to pore over and study. You'll line up these books around the children's work area, read aloud excerpts from these, and reference them as touchstone texts during conferring and during the demonstration portion of your minilessons. If you have the books to support it, you may want to have some of your book clubs studying the whole-class topic during reading workshop. You won't want to underestimate the power that read-aloud will have in propelling this unit forward, exposing your young scientists to a wide variety of nonfiction texts on forces and motion: narrative nonfiction that takes readers through the process of how forces make things move; expository nonfiction that teaches all about springs and magnets and pulleys; nonfiction procedural texts that teach how to accomplish a scientific experiment; and question-and-answer books that invite the reader to wonder along with the author, and answer questions. The work done in read-aloud and reading workshop will not only support a growing content knowledge but also the skills of scientific writing. Through read-aloud you will want to teach children to synthesize portions of text, identifying big ideas, and then show them how these big ideas can serve to propel their experiments. For instance, after growing some big ideas about gravity in read-aloud, children might then plan for experiments these ideas lead them to want to conduct. You'll hear children say things like, "Gravity works differently on different objects. I'm going to drop an eraser and a pencil and see which falls faster to the ground." Then too, as they develop conclusions from their own experiments, children can use what they've learned from reading about forces and motion to add evidence to bolster their own ideas: "My experiment showed that the eraser fell faster. In *What Is Gravity?* it said that gravity pulls more on heavier objects. I think this is why the eraser fell faster than the pencil. It is heavier than the pencil."

Lastly, you'll want to decide *where* your students will do all this writing. You may decide to have students start a scientists' notebook, in which case you'll want to build it up as a place to observe, sketch, question, and wonder—a place to write with volume and stamina as they study the world around them. Then again, you may feel that starting folders is a better option, where students can continue to use varied paper choices and use this folder to collect their writing and experiments.

## **Scientists Write to Learn about the World around Them, Experiment to Answer Lingering Questions, and Use What They Know about Nonfiction Writing to Teach Others What They Have Learned**

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As the unit begins, you'll want to immerse your children in a topic for scientific study. We're recommending that you expose them to one area of Forces and Motion in the first part, narrowing their study to only inclined planes, for instance, or simply magnets. You'll expose them to far more in the second part—once they've learned to observe, research, and write like scientists. So, on Day One, you'll want to spread materials around the room relating to inclined planes (or whatever topic you've chosen), spreading marbles

and rubber balls and various planes around the tables. Give your children this first day to immerse themselves in the study of these objects, to play and experiment and play some more. You'll equip them with paper, or their science notebooks, and show them how to record observations and questions about the objects they're studying, knowing that throughout the unit you'll probably want to teach children more and more ways scientists use their notebooks or folders.

One form of writing you might teach first is sketching with labels and captions, where scientists draw the setup from an experiment and then label it using precise vocabulary and adding in captions that explain the process in greater detail. It is conceivable that some students feeling full of the energy and enthusiasm of discovery will add a few words to one sketch, then move onto another and another. Therefore, it is important to teach them that scientists (and writers!) linger. This means teaching them to add all they can add to their sketches, in both words and images. For example, if a child has drawn a simple sketch of a pulley, then you will teach him to not just draw the base and the string, but to draw the wheel around which the string is wound and the object that hangs from the hook on the end. You will teach this child to label all the parts using the language scientists use (referring to books and read-alouds for this information when necessary) and then to elaborate on those labels by writing captions to accompany them.

As early as Day Two of this unit, you'll be ready to channel all your scientists toward one teacher-led experiment. You'll remind students of all they've learned about the scientific process. You might say, "Remember how in science you learned to ask questions, come up with a hypothesis, make observations, and then make a conclusion at the end? Well, today we're going to do an experiment using an inclined plane and two different-sized balls and use everything we know about the scientific process together." You'll want to give students the essential question that drives the experiment on this day, rallying them toward a common inquiry, saying "Scientists, today we're going to do an experiment where we try rolling these two different balls down the same plane. Let's all be thinking about the question, 'What makes some objects travel faster than others?' as we do the experiment." Students will jot down lingering questions, discuss their hypotheses, try out the experiment you've created for them, and then jot a bit about their big ideas or conclusions. You might even teach children that even after drawing conclusions, we can be led to new questions. For instance, if my conclusion is that heavier balls roll faster than light ones, then next I might start to wonder, "What makes the heavier ball move faster down the plane?" or "What would happen if I used two balls that weigh the same but are different sizes?" You might also consider giving your students special paper, or a template for creating their own paper, on which to record the various stages of the scientific process (questions, hypothesis, observations, and conclusion).

After students have conducted this experiment they will be ready, on the following day, to teach others how to do the same by writing a how-to text. You'll want to have the experiment materials around, as many students will need to reenact the steps of the experiment and remember each step before writing their how-to text. "Wouldn't it be fun to teach the first graders how to do this experiment?" you might begin.

“Let’s use everything we know about nonfiction writing and how-to texts to write up this experiment.” Finally, in the next days, you’ll teach children to design their own experiments from their unanswered and lingering questions. For instance, the student who wondered whether two balls of different sizes but the same weight would travel with equal speed down an inclined plane might now design an experiment to test this question. Again, children will try out the experiment, jot to explore and record their observations, and write procedural how-to texts to teach others how to conduct the same experiment.

## **Collaborating with Partners and Recording Our Experiments, While Raising the Level of Our Non-Narrative Writing**

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You’ll begin this part by setting up tables, much like you did at the beginning of Part I, but this time with a far greater quantity of materials. In Part I you focused your children on one area of forces and motion (inclined planes, say) but will now give them free reign to explore the many areas of this field. You’ll want to pull out all that you have related to this area and borrow from your science teacher and science kits, as well. Planes, magnets, pulleys, springs, various weighted objects and balls—chances are, once it’s all out, children will find more uses for much of this than we ever imagined!

Children enter this week with new musings and ideas to test out and experiment. As they move from teacher-initiated experiments to child-initiated experiments, you might consider allowing children to collaborate with partners or science clubs to discuss which experiments would be best to administer in the classroom, pitching their hypotheses and working together in choosing a project to pursue, aligning with the Common Core State Standards under Speaking and Listening. As children are deciding which experiments to pursue, you’ll want to help them consider some of the following questions: Do we have all the materials we need? How long will this experiment take? Do we have enough time? Which experiment will we want to start with? You’ll then want to show children how to write proposals of experiments they want to try, select one, and get started on following the inquiry process.

Their notebooks or folders are beginning to fill with the fruits of their scientific labor, and you will want to take this opportunity to help students fine-tune and build upon what they’re already doing. In this part, one of your roles will likely be to help children understand that writing plays a vital role in science, helping us to question, analyze, record, and teach others. In Part I you taught students to sketch and label, and you will probably want to begin by teaching them yet another form of observational writing. You’ll want to show them how scientists record, in as much detail as possible, all that they observe while studying magnets or springs or pulleys or planes. They return to their sketches and this time write words, phrases, sentences, and even paragraphs about what they have seen and sketched. Teach them to use prompts like *I notice \_\_\_\_\_, I see \_\_\_\_\_, This reminds me of \_\_\_\_\_* to elaborate on their observations. One way to ensure that your children are doing this writing in as much detail as possible is to teach them to observe with categories like color, texture, shape,

and size in mind. A word of caution: Some children may write assumptions rather than observations. That is, upon noticing that a heavy ball falls faster than a feather, a student might write “Heavier objects fall faster than light objects.” You will want to teach students to write the observation “The heavy ball fell faster than the feather.” Teaching this reinforces that scientists observe without inferring.

Another way that scientists use notebooks is to keep track of data. So, you might teach kids to measure and record their findings or to sort and classify and record that data. This writing might take the form of charts, graphs, or timelines. Children might graph, for instance, the distance different objects travel when sent rolling down an inclined plane. You will want to teach children that when recording data, being exact matters. Teach them to transfer what they are learning in science to the writing workshop, specifically, things like attaching units of measurement to numbers. Then too, you’ll want to teach them more ways to expand upon the information they observe and to formulate possible theories or hypotheses. You’ll find it helpful to chart out several prompts and teach children to use them to develop and elaborate on their ideas. Among others, you’ll certainly want to teach prompts like *I noticed \_\_\_\_\_, This makes me realize \_\_\_\_\_, I used to think . . . but, now I know \_\_\_\_\_, My thinking changed because \_\_\_\_\_.*

It will be important to help children negotiate time spent “experimenting” and time spent writing. You’ll want to remind students that writing is a powerful tool for thinking, and teach them new ways to record, analyze, and write about information. Draw attention to child-created record systems and encourage your young scientists to draw on all they know as they branch into this work. You might find yourself saying, “Scientists, writers, I want to show you all what Charlie has created. He developed this chart for keeping track of how long it takes each ball to roll down the plane. It’s really helping him organize his data. Charlie has agreed to let us make some copies of his chart and add it to our writing center so we all can use it to record our data.” Or, “Can I stop you all? Sam just came up with a great idea. He realized that the prompts we use to have ideas about our books, *This makes me think \_\_\_\_\_, I wonder \_\_\_\_\_, The idea I’m having about this is \_\_\_\_\_* can also help us to have ideas about what we’re seeing in our experiments!”

Then too, you’ll want to teach children to question and wonder about forces and motion with pencils in hand. Because it is important that children continue to write with volume and stamina, you will want to teach them to try to hypothesize answers to their musings according to the Common Core State Standards. You could imagine kids saying things like, “I wonder why . . . ” or “How come . . . ?” Teach children to catch these thoughts by quickly jotting them in their notebooks. Then, teach them to think through possible answers (hypotheses) by using prompts such as *Maybe \_\_\_\_\_, Could it be \_\_\_\_\_? But what about \_\_\_\_\_?* and *The best explanation is \_\_\_\_\_.* For example, assuming that your topic this month is forces and motion, you might show children a few observations you’ve made on the subway or while playing ball in the park. “I noticed that every time I threw a baseball to my friend, it went up and then slowly down when it got closer to her, sort of like the arc of a rainbow. Even though I was just trying to throw the ball to my friend, I couldn’t get it to go in a straight line.

It always went up and then down. That got me wondering why!” At this point, you might lean in and share with the children how this led you to develop a hypothesis. “Writers, I’ve been thinking about this and I came up with a few explanations for why this happens, a few *hypotheses*.” You might then begin writing these out on a chart or document camera. “My first hypothesis is that when I throw the ball up, there is something invisible pulling it down.” Continue on, developing a second conceivable explanation. “My second hypothesis is that there is something about the way I’m throwing the ball that makes it arc, that maybe if someone else threw one it would go straight across the air.”

Children will learn to write in these various ways throughout the unit, sometimes through minilessons, other times through teaching shares, mid-workshop teaching points, or while stopping and jotting during read-alouds. As we mentioned earlier, you’ll want to see this unit as cyclical—you’ll be encouraging children to move through the scientific process again and again across this month, each time teaching them new ways to write, record, and polish.

Throughout this part of the unit, children will develop and harness questions into plans for their own experiments. They will raise questions, conduct experiments to answer those questions, jot observations, and draw conclusions, in the end creating many little “lab reports” that will later—in the next part of the unit—become part of a final published product. As students move through this process, you’ll want to remind them that science is about experimentation and that, just like writers, scientists often go back to revise and try again. Encourage partnerships to raise questions, conduct an experiment, note what worked and what didn’t, and then design another, new experiment. Once they have discovered a powerful experiment, they’ll move to documenting it in a how-to text so others can replicate it.

As the young writers draft their how-to texts for their experiments, you’ll want to teach into the various craft moves that procedural writers use. You will want to immerse children in the sounds of these texts by choosing a few to read aloud and study, examining how writers use their words and pictures to teach readers. Some good models of procedural books include *Nature Science Experiments: What’s Hopping in a Dust Bunny?* and the *I’m a Scientist* series from DK Publishing. You’ll also want to reference the procedural portions of *Move It! Motion, Forces, and You* by Adrienne Mason, *Get to Wedges* by Crabtree Publishing Company, and *Learning About the Way Things Move* by Dr. Heidi Gold-Dworkin. These will serve as mentor texts as the unit progresses and provide lots of possibilities for the ways children can write more in a procedural text.

Just as you used storytelling to help writers develop language that more closely matches the language of good storytellers, you’ll want to coach students to tell and retell class activities in ways that teach others, thus honing their ability to document experiments with accuracy and detail. For example, they might teach each other how to go across the monkey bars without falling, or how to make flowers out of tissue paper. As students practice retelling class activities, you can teach them how to use sequence words (e.g., *first*, *then*, *next*, *finally*) to organize their thinking and convey timing. You will also want to teach them how to use very specific language to clarify their thinking and instructions: if a student storytells or writes, “Get the toothpaste,” encourage her

to verbalize how to get the toothpaste. If you help her to think about how she does it or actually demonstrate the action, she may decide on “Slowly squeeze the tube to put toothpaste on the toothbrush” instead.

It can be helpful for students to act out their experiments with partners as a way to uncover precise actions and language needed for readers to effectively complete a task. You will want to teach children that in order to write procedural texts, they need to envision the steps they go through when they perform a given task. They should see it like a “movie in their minds,” and then write each step they see in their “movie.” Often, children will leave out big steps or assume their readers know more than they do. This is a great way to use writing partners. One partner can read her writing aloud while the other partner acts it out. You might give time in the middle of the workshop for partners to get together and rehearse the steps for the experiment that they are planning to write that day. You will want to teach children how to listen to each other’s writing in order to follow the steps laid out and to see if they work. This way, writers can see the effect of their words and steps on a reader and get input that will help them revise their pieces for clarity.

In addition to teaching into the quality of the writing children are doing both in their notebook and their procedural texts, you’ll want to make sure children are making use of the wealth of knowledge they’re getting from their reading about forces and motion, whether through independent or club reading, or during read-aloud. You’ll probably want to show children how to supplement their conclusions with factual information. For instance, students writing about the conclusion that smooth objects travel faster than bumpy ones down a plane might want to add in information they got from reading, about how smooth surfaces have less friction and therefore travel at greater speeds. Then too, students will use the information they get from reading to design and imagine their own experiments. You’ll want students, after reading about particular information in a text, to question it and say, “That doesn’t seem true. Let’s make an experiment and test it.”

You’ll want partners to support this work as well, pushing each other to be stronger scientists and writers. You’ll want to teach them how to compare observations and discuss what one can learn from another. For instance, “I see that you have all these little details in your picture; maybe I could make my picture more detailed,” or, “When you did that experiment you found that the rubber ball rolled faster. In my experiment the marble went faster down the plane. Maybe we should try again.”

## **Putting All Our Learning Together and Publishing Our “Lab Reports”**

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In this final part, the children will compile all the information they have learned about their topics and make informational books that teach others how to conduct similar experiments. These will have an introduction, give information about the topic, describe the procedures and daily journey, and discuss their conclusions. Children may select to write up one experiment that they tried or a series of experiments that they try to help answer a question.

You'll probably want to begin by explaining to the children that part of being a scientist is deciding how you'll teach the world about what you've discovered. Remind them of all they know from prior units, perhaps pulling out old charts and mentor texts about various kinds of procedural, expository, and narrative nonfiction writing. You'll want to study these texts with your students as well as the texts that served as mentors through this unit, helping your young scientists to imagine the final product their research will take. *Nature Science Experiments: What's Hopping in a Dust Bunny?* and *I'm a Scientist: Kitchen* are both strong examples of how these finished products might look. Do they have several experiments they want to publish, along with excerpts from their science journals and facts to explain what their findings show? Do they want to showcase the long process of inquiry that led to one final conclusion, and therefore publish a journal of sorts that brims with all their notebook entries, musings, research, and final conclusions? These books, like other informational books, will have introductions and a section for conclusions, show the writers' questions and their findings, and will also show others how to conduct the experiment.

You'll especially want to refer students back to Unit Four, Expert Projects: Informational Writing, and perhaps flip back to that unit plan yourself. Just as in December, you'll most likely begin drafting the final product with a study of introductions. You'll want to show writers ways that authors of other books have written this all-important part of the book. Remind them that some writers, for example, tell the story of when they first became interested in the topic, and then what they did that kindled those sparks of interest, and what fed the interest even more. The author traces the story of her study, and does so in a way that brings readers along on that same journey. There are many other ways introductions can be organized, and you'll want to share examples of especially well-written ones with your children. Encourage them to try many alternate drafts, much the way they try out multiple leads when drafting stories, reminding them that informational writing is as much about voice as it is about facts.

Then, of course, as with their December projects, a writer might address the reader directly, asking the reader questions such as, "Have you ever stopped to think about . . . ? Every time you do . . . you are . . ." or, "Did you know that . . . ? It is also true that . . ." Then, having provoked readers' interest, this writer might launch into an overview of the topic. That overview might well be structured in the same way that the book itself will be structured. For example, if this book teaches readers about gravity, the book might be organized in a way that follows the scientists' series of investigations—beginning with the first, simplest attempts to understand the topic and eventually moving toward more specific experiments and nuanced findings. Or it could be organized to teach first about gravity, then about friction. Either way, the introduction might follow the structure of the book.

Much of the revision work students engage in will involve the experiments they choose to include in their final piece. You'll want to assess the work your students did writing these procedural texts and use your findings to inform your whole-class and small-group instruction. Certainly, you'll want to revisit nonfiction how-to texts as a class and use these as guides for revising and adding features of nonfiction to your

children's own pieces. These books are valuable models for the possible components of a how-to. Some how-to books and manuals include a materials page. Others include *cautions* or *warnings* for the reader. Other books are persuasive, trying to get you to try doing something new: "Haven't you always wanted to . . . ?" or "Did you ever wonder why . . . ?" Others have an ending that brings everything to a conclusion, like "If your egg survives the fall, then bring it home and have your mom cook it up!" Children can learn about these kinds of additions by studying a text, and they can then add the features they like to their own books.

Additionally, you'll want to encourage your writers to use some of the craft moves they have been working on all year. This might include adding speech bubbles or dialogue, including setting, and using descriptive details to paint a picture in a reader's mind. Children can also try using sound words, ellipses, and playing with the size of their writing and capitals to emphasize what they are saying. Be sure to refer to the charts that you have in your classroom already.

As children begin revising their pieces, you will again want them to examine their how-to texts for clarity, perhaps thinking more about *how* readers might perform certain steps. For example, a child who writes, "Put the ball at the top of the ramp," might ask herself, "How? You need to put the ball right in the center of the ramp so it doesn't roll off the side. And you need to hold onto it until you are ready to start the timer because otherwise it will roll down on its own." As they revise, young writers can also begin incorporating further conventions of the how-to genre, such as making their pictures teach more by eliminating extraneous details, zooming in close on the part of the picture that teaches, and using labels and arrows in their pictures. They might add warnings or advice that steer readers out of trouble: "Make sure not to push the ball down the ramp. Just let it go gently. Don't worry if you don't get it right the first time—being a scientist takes practice!" During revision, partners can also ask each other clarifying questions, like "What do you mean?" or "How do you do that?" or suggest possible tips or warnings such as, "You should write, 'Do this experiment outdoors,' because if the egg breaks it will make a big mess!"

As you move children through the process of drafting and revision, you'll certainly want to spend some time teaching into the art of writing conclusions, once again referring back to what they learned in the informational writing unit earlier in the year. The scientific process leads to final conclusions, and part of your job will be to help young writers craft these final ideas in ways that are both persuasive and full of voice. You may begin by teaching writers the importance of using sources to defend one's claims, and discussing the relationship between evidence and the claim. Help students know the value of specific, detailed, factual evidence that supports whatever they have said. So if a child writes, "Gravity is very strong," then that child needs to understand that he or she must defend this claim, and to do so by producing evidence, or supportive details. Help children value quotations, numbers, and specific examples. For instance, they might tell about the time they and their partner tried, in vain, to jump into the air and stay there. "No matter how hard we tried," a child might write, "gravity pulled our feet back down to the ground every time. We couldn't stay in the air."

You'll want to pull out the charts from your informational writing unit, reminding writers that once they have produced evidence, it is important to talk about that evidence, linking it back to the claim. In this way, it is much like a partnership conversation about the evidence, only they have that conversation on the page. Scaffolds and thought prompts such as, *This is important because . . . You might be surprised to learn that . . . This shows that . . . I used to not realize . . . but now I have found . . . The thing I am realizing about this is . . . The surprising thing about this is . . . Notice that . . .* will be immensely helpful.

## Celebrating

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Your students have completed a shared research project, where they have not only gone through the writing process but have simultaneously been through the scientific method of research. You will want to celebrate their work in a way that honors both! Many teachers in the past have held a science fair where students set up booths with their experiments, lab reports, and findings. If you choose this option, you'll want to prepare students for the event by helping them to create a small oral presentation about their writing piece, describing both the writing and scientific work they did throughout the unit. Many children may choose to have live experiments set up during the fair, as well, so they can showcase their findings for onlookers. Other students might even choose to present their work using a computer or PowerPoint. Whatever the device used to show how to conduct the experiments and present the findings, you will want to help children understand how to talk to a live audience and present a project, referring to their documents and materials and asking for questions from the visitors. Regardless of the celebration method you choose, you'll want to coordinate something special to highlight the work of your young scientists and honor their focused efforts.

## Additional Resources

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In this unit your students will live like scientists. They will observe, question, and research content together. They will be discovering things around them and writing to teach others what they are learning.

As you approach this unit, it will be important for you to read the entire write-up, not just the teaching points below, because kids learn through the work they do, and the write-up is jam-packed with ideas, activities, and teaching to help you organize and create opportunities for children to engage in work that matters. The unit write-up can help you issue the generous invitation that rallies kids not only to work with heart and soul, but to also engage in deliberate practice, trying to get better at specific skills that the unit aims to highlight.

In the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. This part of our teaching relies on you assessing your students often—not in big fancy ways,

but by watching the work they do—and you seeing their work as feedback on your teaching. If you have taught something and only a handful of kids are able to sustain that work to good effect, then you'll want to decide whether that skill was essential, whether you want to reteach it in a new way, or whether you want to detour around it. You'll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching through an attentiveness to student work, because the work your students do is not just showing you what they can do or can't do, it is also showing you what *you* can do.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Scientists Write about the World around Them, Experiment to Answer Lingering Questions, and Use What They Know about Nonfiction Writing to Teach Others What They Have Learned**

- “Today I want to teach you that scientists record as much information as we can while we are observing and studying our topics. We can draw detailed precise illustrations and label using precise vocabulary. We can also add captions to explain our work.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “Scientists can use specific tools to help us write and collect information. We can use our rulers to jot specific measurements, graph paper to draw true to scale, and hand lenses to see every little detail.”
- “Today I want to teach you that as scientists conduct experiments we want to keep detailed accurate notes. We want to pay close attention to the materials we use, how long things take, and what our conclusions are about what happened.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “Sometimes we may even conduct our experiment more than once to see if we get similar results and to help us capture all the information we need.”
- “Today I’m going to teach you that talking about science is a lot like talking about books. We can use our book-talk charts to grow different kinds of ideas in science. Whenever we need ideas for our writing, we can look at the chart and say the prompt to ourselves and let the prompt lead us to an idea. We can use prompts like *I noticed \_\_\_\_\_, This makes me realize \_\_\_\_\_, I used to think . . . but now I know \_\_\_\_\_, My thinking changed because \_\_\_\_\_.*”
- “Today I want to teach you that as we observe, record, and grow ideas about our topics we can also create questions that we want to pursue. We can ask ourselves, What are our observations making us wonder? and What questions do we have that we think we could test out? Then, we write our ideas about these questions.”

## Part Two: Collaborating with Partners and Recording Our Experiments, While Raising the Level of Our Non-Narrative Writing

- “Today I want to teach you that as we are working with our partners, we need to decide whether or not an experiment is possible to test. They may be good ideas for an experiment, though they might not be possible in our classrooms. Some questions we may consider when choosing our experiments are: Do we have all of the materials we need? How long will this experiment take? Do we have enough time? Which experiment will we want to start with?”
- “Today I’m going to teach you that talking about science is a lot like talking about books. We can use our book-talk charts to grow different kinds of ideas in science. Whenever we need ideas for our writing, we can look at the chart and say the prompt to ourselves and let the prompt lead us to an idea. We can use prompts like *I noticed \_\_\_\_\_, This makes me realize \_\_\_\_\_, I used to think \_\_\_\_\_ but now I know \_\_\_\_\_, My thinking changed because \_\_\_\_\_.*”
- “Today I want to teach you that as we observe, record, and grow ideas about our topics we can also create questions we want to pursue. We can ask ourselves, What are our observations making us wonder? and What questions do we have that we think we could test out? Then, we write our ideas about these questions.”
- “Today I want to teach you to use everything that we remember from writing how-to books and our class experiments to support us when writing our experiments. We can think about what we need and each step in the experiment.”
  - ▮ *Tip: “As we are writing like a scientist, we want to think about: asking a question, including background research, constructing a hypothesis, testing your hypothesis by doing an experiment, analyzing your data, and drawing a conclusion and communicating your results.”*
- “Today I want to teach you that writers can revise our writing with partners to add more specific information or additional steps, or to take away unnecessary parts. Being specific allows our readers to replicate our experiments. We can add information that teaches how much, how long, how it moves, and so on.”
  - ▮ *Tip: “When we are revising, we want to make sure that our steps match and sometimes we need to take away parts that don’t match or are not clear.”*

## Part Three: Putting All Our Learning Together and Publishing Our “Lab Reports”

- “Today I want to teach you that writers plan informational/experiment books by rereading our notes and thinking about the big things we learned and the

experiments we conducted. Then, we can choose the information that is important to teach others.”

▮ *Tip:* “As we are writing, working with partners can help us remember and decide which information is the most important to include in our books.”

■ “Today I want to teach you to use mentors to help us make our writing look and sound like other science books in the world. We can think about how we want our whole books to be structured, individual pages to be organized, which details science writers often include, and so on. As we are studying our mentor texts, we may ask ourselves, What is this author doing in her writing that I could do, too?”

▮ *Tip:* “As we are writing, we can choose or design our paper choice to match our mentor texts. We can keep our books at our writing spots and study how the author organized the page.”

■ “Today I want to teach you that writers use everything we know to revise and say more in our lab reports. We can make comparisons, give examples, use definitions, and so on. This will help our readers understand what we are teaching.”

■ “Today I want to teach you that writers can include an introduction and conclusion to our books. When we are writing our introductions and conclusions, we think about the important points in our books. We can highlight the important information and give a little information about our topics in our introductions and conclusions.”

▮ *Tip:* “It is great to glance back at our mentor texts to get ideas. In some introductions, the authors ask their readers questions. In other books, the conclusions recap the key ideas presented in the book.”

■ “Today I want to remind you that you are writing for readers and we want to make sure that our writing is as easy to read as possible. We have a toolkit full of strategies to help us edit our writing. As we are editing our writing, remember to check our spelling, use capital letters at the beginning of sentences, and punctuation at the end of sentences.”

■ “Today I want to teach you to think about ways to make our books as visually attractive as possible for our readers. Some things we can include in our books are photographs, changing the size of text, designing an eye-catching cover, writing an intriguing blurb for the back, and creating an author’s page that includes other books the author has written.”



## UNIT TEN

# Poetry

## *Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*

### JUNE

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We think that poetry may enliven June more than other June units have been able to do. The poetry work children do at the end of second grade builds a foundation of precise language use and attention to detail and to close reading that will be important in third grade, even in test preparation! Poetry can actually allow kids to show off all they have learned. After all, poets plan, write with detail, revise, make reading-writing connections—the works! In this way, poetry can culminate a year of learning. Poetry writing can also set children up for living intensely literate lives all summer long. Young poets will find significance in the ordinary details of their lives.

For specifics on teaching poetry, we strongly suggest you lean on *Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages* in *Units of Study for Primary Writing* by Lucy Calkins (Heinemann, 2003). This is an all-time favorite unit from that series and a particularly sophisticated part of it—teachers of upper grades have leaned on it as well!

### Turning Our Classroom into a Place Where Poems Grow

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You'll want to think about what you might do to immerse children in poetry quickly so they can start writing poems to good effect. There is no one way to pull off the immersion part of this unit. You could devote two days to a deep involvement in choral reading of a few beloved poems, helping children realize that one reads a poem in ways that bring it to life. A poem about raindrops might be read with a splattering of voices, scattered around the room, as kids call out words in a way that is reminiscent of raindrops in a spring rain, and then as the poem progresses, the voices might change, reflecting the showers turning to a downpour. A poem might be read with two voices interacting,

and perhaps for a time the readers stand back-to-back, turning at some point toward each other. You could give a copy of one poem to six different clusters of readers, and different readers can perform that one poem differently, in ways that reflect different interpretations. That could be your introduction to this unit. Or you could vary this by adding an emphasis on dance steps, or gestures, or beats.

Then again, you could find other ways to immerse children in poetry. You could share a read-aloud tape or video clip of a poet reading her poetry to integrate the use of audio recordings of poems so that they too might try this oral work as suggested in the Common Core State Standards. The class might decide to make such a tape, if everyone finds a special poem and practices reading it well—perhaps the tapes could become gifts for loved ones. You could create poetry centers around the room and invent various engaging things that students could do in the different centers. In one center, students might make “found” poems, leafing through magazines to find words (and photos) that could be cut out and taped in ways that say something profound (and instant). In another center, students could draw the images that come to mind as they read a couple of especially powerful poems, letting the class as a whole explore the imagery those selected poems convey. In yet another poetry center, children could look at little objects, such as a pine cone, aiming to see the object with a “poet’s eyes.” You may look to Session I of *Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages* (2003) to see what this could sound like. You could use Nan Fry’s poem about the apple to show children what it means to see with a poet’s eyes—she looks at an apple sliced in two and sees a snow-covered field, and when someone takes a bite, she hears the sound of boots, crunching on snow.

And at any moment, a child may feel inspired to start a poem—and should! No matter what you do to immerse children in poetry, you will want them to be collecting ideas for poems. Most teachers reincarnate their “Tiny Topics notepads” from the Authors as Mentors unit and suggest children use these to find poems hiding in the details of their lives. You might refer to Session IV in the book to remind students how to use their notebooks as a tool: “Remember that earlier this year when we were learning to write like Angela Johnson, we kept Tiny Topics notepads. If we were at home or at recess and we saw something tiny, something important that we knew we’d want to remember, we jotted it into our Tiny Topic notepads. I think we need to begin to do that again, only this time you’ll observe little tiny details (like shadows that drift across your ceiling) that could become seeds for poems.”

You’ll want to teach children, then, how to take a glimmer of an idea and to get a draft of a poem on the page. How does one actually go about drafting a poem? We’re not sure. Some poets say you fill yourself up with an intense feeling, and a concrete image, and then write in a rush, almost as if you’d just run into the room to tell someone something and were so bursting with what you wanted to say that you spoke with extra urgency, fast and furiously, directly to the person (in this case, the reader). Some poets talk about how it starts with a line—just one line, dropped as if from the heavens. Once the poet has a line, she plays in her mind with how it will go, almost like one might play with different options for how to name a newborn baby—does

that sound right? How about this? Once the poet has a tiny bit that sounds right, she or he is off and running.

The important thing is that this should feel intense and joyful and unpredictable—this is like a toboggan ride down a hill. You line yourself up at the top of the hill; you wait until the way is cleared; you make sure everyone is aboard and that all feet are tucked in, and then in a whoosh, the toboggan is off. There is a way in which writing, like tobogganing, can't be stopped midway.

Later, though, there is the talk about that ride—how was it? Should we try again? And poets, like toboggan riders, can line themselves up differently, hoping the next time for a smoother ride. That's revision—that next ride. Most of the revision that will work the best for young poets is not a fix-up routine. It is about trying again.

## Tinkering with Poems that a Poet Likes

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Once a poet has written a bunch of drafts and one of those drafts—or part of one, anyhow—seems to be strong and true, then the poet can pull in to do a different sort of revision work. He might tinker around the edges of the poem, trying to make something alive and powerful even more perfect. Teach children that as poets revise, we also lift the level of our poetry-writing skills, so the next poems we write incorporate all that we have learned through revision.

One of the most engaging parts of revision will be playing around with different line breaks. To illustrate the effect that different sorts of line breaks could make, you might put each word (or each phrase) from a class poem onto a separate card, and then use a pocket chart to show the class that changing the length of the lines can change the feeling of the poem.

You might also push kids to think about language and word choice as a way to create clear images with precise and extravagant language. They could think about the difference between *fry* and *sizzle*, *shine* and *sparkle*, *cry* and *bawl*. You might comb through the poem with children, showing them how to search for each action word, pausing to ask, "What other words could fit here? Is there another word that can say the same thing in a better way?" Then, too, you could set children up in partnerships to read their poems to each other, giving feedback and looking carefully for places where everyday, commonplace verbs could be traded for fresher, more accurate action words: *jiggle* or *sway* could replace *move*, *moan* and *groan* could replace *complain*. Encourage your young poets to play around with language, listening to how words sound, thinking about what images they convey, aiming always for precision, aligning with the Common Core State Standards around the use of language. Both Sessions VII and VIII in *Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages* (Calkins, *Units of Study*, 2003) are aimed at getting your poets to use more precise language, and we suggest you turn to them for examples of what lessons around language might look like.

Part of the decision-making process involved in word choice is related to poets thinking about the tone and rhythm of the poem. Is this poem serious or more light-hearted? Does the poem read like the steady, cyclical collision of waves on the shore?

Or does it read like the staccato trip and bubble of a stream gurgling over rocks? With their partners, readers might think about how their poems sound and ask, “Does my poem sound long and flowing? Or does it sound bouncy and short?” Then you might teach poets to comb through their poems and ask, “What word might fit the sound of this poem better?”

You may also show students how poets use language and metaphors in powerful ways to convey the meaning and feeling behind their poems. Session XI in the book talks about making an explicit comparison between ordinary language and poetic language. You may, for instance, teach children to make comparisons and sustain comparisons so as to give their readers pictures in their minds. You might start by keeping an ear open to the kinds of comparisons kids are naturally using in their everyday speech. Perhaps a child comments on a thunderstorm: “That rain cloud looks like midnight!” You might name that as a simile—or a comparison—and explain that poets use those types of comparisons in their writing. You’ll also want to teach kids that poets try to compare two things in new, surprising ways. In a poet’s eyes (and voice), a concrete object like the sun can be used to describe a nonconcrete thing like a friendship or the love a mother feels for her child. Sometimes poets compare or join two seemingly unlike things to convey an image, feeling, or bit of wisdom; for example, “an alphabet of stars,” from the poem “Night Story” by Beverly McLoughland, suggests that the sky of stars has a story to tell, that something is written in the sky. Most people wouldn’t think to compare the alphabet to stars, but a *poet* sees the words, the story in those stars.

To guide your young poets through some of this work, you may choose a few mentor poems or specific poets to show your children how they might play with language and the placement of text to convey meaning. You could model your teaching after the lessons you taught during the Authors as Mentors unit. You might teach children how to create rhythm like Eloise Greenfield, line breaks like Bobbi Katz, or imagery like Valerie Worth. Encourage your writers to lay their poems alongside those of their mentor author and ask themselves, “Am I really writing in the style of this poet? Am I conveying meaning the way this poet does?” As you confer with your writers you might ask them, “What are you trying to say as a writer?” “Where is the heart of your poem?” “How are you using white space like Myra Cohn Livingston?” “Where are you using repetition like Eloise Greenfield?”

Writing partnerships will continue to support students as they craft their poetry. As they’ve done in other units, partners can help each other think about the topics they choose to write about, the craft of their poems, and the feelings they convey. They could experiment with the use of language and how the poems are laid out on the page with line breaks and white space. You could teach them to ask each other questions such as, “Why did you choose to add a line break here?” “What small moment are you trying to rewrite?” “Whose work are you trying to emulate?” Partners can also make suggestions such as, “Have you thought of using this word instead?” Together, poetry partners can play with language or line breaks to investigate other ways a poem could sound or look, to match the meaning they are trying to convey.

## Edit, Publish, and Celebrate Anthologies of Poetry

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Unlike other units where children choose one piece to publish, in this unit they might pick a bunch of their own poems to make public. In the last few days of the unit they could revise these poems, choosing craft moves they have learned so far. Just as they do in every unit, writers will edit for spelling and punctuation, and here, for shape and white space as well, so that their writing looks and sounds just the way they intend it to. There are multiple ways you might wrap up and celebrate this unit. You might choose to take these selected poems and put them into a class anthology, which belongs to the classroom or is copied for each student. You might allow each poet to create his or her own anthology or perhaps let each poet create an anthology that contains his or her own poems as well as the poems by their mentor poets. Other alternatives could be to post published poems around the school for all to see or to post them in nearby public places like neighboring coffee shops. You might have students set poems to music or give their poetry away, creating “literary gifts.” You might also encourage students to read their poetry with a variety of audiences, perhaps in an actual coffeehouse or café, creating the feeling of an authentic poetry reading. Another idea is to have children and adults write poetry side by side with the children teaching the adults as they write. Perhaps the children are in groups and leading stations where they instruct adults on how to generate ideas or craft their ideas into poems. Children and adults could also travel through poetry centers together, creating collaborative poems as they go.

All of these options can provide a meaningful way for your students to create beautiful final pieces, as well as share and celebrate their poems with the world. But in the end, you’ll decide what works best for your children and your class.

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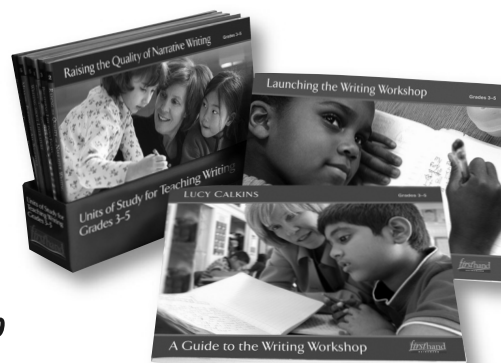
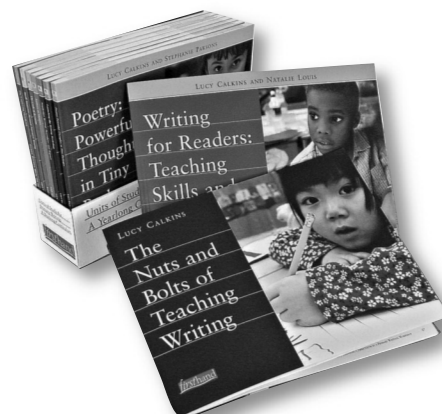
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